

The
Lady

on
the

Drawing Room
Floor x x



M. E. Coleridge.



Class PZ3

Book C6793L

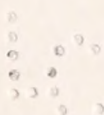
THE LADY ON THE
DRAWINGROOM FLOOR

THE LADY ON THE DRAWINGROOM FLOOR

BY

M. E. COLERIDGE

AUTHOR OF "THE KING WITH TWO FACES," "THE FIERY DAWN,"
"THE SHADOW ON THE WALL," ETC.



NEW YORK

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.

LONDON: EDWARD ARNOLD

1906

I

WHEN first I came to know Lucilla, she had lived on this unworthy earth for many years—how many I do not recollect. She told me once, for she was frank about matters regarding which most women are silent, as well as reserved on those which they discuss. I recollect certain words that she used.

“ *I welcome the years gladly !* ” she said.

They struck me—and I wondered why. Why should she, why should any one else for the matter of that, “ welcome the years gladly ? ” “ *Patiently* ”—“ *submissively* ”—“ *resignedly* ”—these expressions I could have understood. How was it possible that any living thing should welcome “ gladly ” the

harbingers of eyelessness, toothlessness, gout, and sleep?

And then she told me her age; and not caring to think of it, for, to my mind, Death sits always on the doorstep of any one whom I love, I changed the current of our talk. I have no memory for such details. Those who honour me with their friendship do not belong to Time.

She lived above me, in every sense of the word. Light was her object in the geography of life; ease being mine. She wanted to go up as many stairs as possible—I as few. Therefore I lodged on the ground-floor, while she had rooms *au premier*. Her coming into these rooms made such a curious difference that the period before she came is all confusion, like those chaotic periods of History before there were any Kings and Queens.

To the best of my belief, however, I had lived in the house about a hundred years before I grew conscious of her presence. I had looked for a hundred years at the little flat houses in front, each one exactly like the

other. I had looked for a hundred years upon the soot-strewn "leads" behind.

After the coming of Lucilla the view changed. Only an effort of memory now recalls to me the fact that once it was dull.

"These houses all alike! Who ever said such a thing? He could have had no eyes in his head," said she.

"Well!" I observed, "you can't see much in the house opposite."

"You can see a story written by Balzac, if you look. That house opposite is *The Old Lady's House*. Nobody lives there except the Old Lady and her dogs and her cook and her maid. It is all in apple-pie order; and she thinks she can never have anybody to stay because there is not room enough and the servants would be overworked. Really, she does not care for other people except in other people's houses."

"But the next house is exactly like it."

"Forgive me—nothing could be more different! The house next door is *The Children's House*. There are six of the

children, and only a mother, who's a widow, and one general, to look after them all ; but the general does not leave so often as the Old Lady's cook, and they are always having people to stay—sometimes a girl with red hair, sometimes a girl with black, sometimes both girls together. They're not pretty children, but the baby is—well, she is a baby!—and now and then the artist who lives on the other side, and has a knocker made of snakes, will borrow her to paint."

"The next door on the other side of the Old Lady?" I said, with a gasp.

"I have not yet made up my mind as to the next door on the other side of the Old Lady. He must have something to do with a flower shop, I think. There is a palm in the window. I am sure she could not afford to *buy* a palm."

After that I looked out for an Old Lady at one window and a Baby at another, and an Artist at another and a mysterious Florist's wife at another, and life had four new interests. As for the leads, they disappeared.

Lucilla covered them up with flower pots and ran a creeper along the wall.

The change without, however, was nothing to the change within.

Yet before she came I had considered myself rather fortunate in my lodgings, as London lodgings go. There was nobody musical in them to begin with. Nobody played scales.

To continue, I was on good terms with the landlord—a small trim, wiry, green-eyed man, wide awake and observant. When not at work he stood with his hands in his pockets, and an oddly wistful air of expecting something that never came. It was, perhaps, his wife, for she would make no response when he summoned her, and he summoned her rather often. He was an ex-butler, and he had a kind of distant regard for a gentleman—even for a gentleman who was not rich.

“He calls me *Sir*—and I like it!” said a young fellow of six, an acquaintance of mine, when I questioned him once as to the character of his butler.

My landlord called me *Sir* ; and I liked it.

He finished a bottle of wine sometimes, without asking leave ; but at the slightest hint he always made it clear that he would not have done this if he had not thought me a gentleman. I forbore to ask him why stealing from a gentleman was not stealing at all, when stealing from any one else was. He stole nothing besides, and my respect for his character suffered little diminution because his code of justice was not ethically sound. Robin Hood held much as he did. Most likely I stole something from him without knowing it. We are all robbers, if it comes to that, and we live by depriving each other of valuable assets for which money is no compensation. I would not have taken twice the money, to do for him what he did for me, to brush his clothes and clean his boots. Surely he was entitled to an extra glass of wine on occasion.

“ Very wrong indeed ! ” said Lucilla, without paying the slightest heed to my line of argument. “ He never touches anything in

my cupboard. If you want him to have an extra glass of wine, tell him so!"

I did.

From that day to this he has never touched a drop; which inclines me to think that stolen wine—like stolen waters—must be sweet.

His deference in conversation pleased. It is not granted to every one to talk well about the weather. Shepherds do so, according to a brilliant modern essayist, and sailors likewise. If the essayist had had the privilege of knowing this estimable man, my landlord would have been included. When the weather was very hot, he alluded to the eruption of some distant volcano in a tone implying that, of course, I knew all about it. If there was a hard frost, he mentioned icebergs in the North Sea, and said something respectful about the Glacial Theory as though it were a friend of mine.

The landlady was a much cleverer man than the landlord. Her weekly bills were a marvel of ingenuity. No single item amounted to more than sixpence—in fact it was, as a

rule, far below that sum—and yet the total caused dismay. She was tall and rather handsome ; hard, black hair ; hard, black eyes ; the slightly aquiline nose that governs trade. Her husband stood much in awe of her ; his instinctive knowledge that I did also, formed another bond between us. Outwardly, she was more honest than he, but she was voluble, and I would rather lose half a bottle of wine any day than the idle froth of fancies that her sharp tongue put to flight. It is open to me to get another bottle of wine, it is not open to me to call back the mood that is gone. The attitude of the landlord always implied that I knew many things which he would give the world to know. The attitude of his wife always implied that I must desire to know many things that she knew, things that I would have given the world not to know. She fulfilled to the letter the terrible description of being a host in herself. Two or three other women might have rushed into the room and made less noise in it than she did. There was no keeping her out. She *would* come in.

She *would* tell me why coals had risen and what had gone wrong with the sink. She seemed to think that these mysterious afflictions were in some way due to me—that I was bound in honour to give her an equivalent in solid cash for the annoyance that they caused. Coals and the sink do not interest me. I used to hum the air from “Cox and Box:”

“Coals haven’t got souls
Any more than they have legs.”

I used to wonder why I never could say *Don’t come in* when I heard her rat-tat-tat on my door. I could no more say it than Macbeth could say “Amen” to the pious ejaculation of the groom in his sleep. There are things that cannot be said.

Still I preferred even the landlady to the landlady’s maidservant. She was always addressed as “Mahry,” a cockney equivalent for the French name of *Marie*, which is considered much more elegant than *Mary* plain and simple. Her shoes were down-at-

heel: her hair was neither up nor down; her face looked as if she slept in the coal-hole. When I asked her to do anything, she said *Yiss*; and when I asked her if she knew anything, she said *Naow*!

Lucilla had not dwelt in the house a week before a subtle transformation took place.

First of all the shoes of Mahry reformed themselves. Instead of flap-flopping about the room like a moribund fish, they began to move quietly and steadily. Some one had given her a new pair of shoes, I imagined.

A day or two later, some one appeared to have given her new hair. She arranged it in bright and pretty plaits. She looked like a different being.

Yet later she appeared with a new face and new hands. I did not know her. Not for the world would I have given my landlady a conversational opening; but I expressed surprise and gratification to my landlord.

“Yes sir,” he rejoined. “It’s Miss Z. She takes a interest in the gurl.”

There was an unmistakable air of rejuvenescence about him also. He had a furtive appearance of enjoying occupations that were not in the day’s work, nailing up creepers and the like. He never actually whistled, but he looked as if some day he might. He expressed to me, with deference, as if I had provided him with her, his opinion that he had done very well to secure Miss Z. as a lodger.

“She’s a lady, sir, she is !”

Was Miss Z. taking an interest in him too ?

There was a strange silence on the part of the landlady.

Even the landlady was not the same. She cooked much better than before — or much less badly. I once remarked with hesitation, anxious however, to show that I was not indifferent, how much more enjoyable dinner had become of late. I knew how things ought not to be done ; but

beyond this I knew nothing. Miss Z. came to the front again at once. Miss Z., the landlady assured me, took a interest in cooking, she knew how things ought to be done, she had suggested certain amendments, certain methods in vogue at all the fashionable clubs. The landlord ought to have known about them, but he did not. He never did nothing but read "The Dyly Myle." How was she, the landlady, to know? She was not a idle man, she thanked goodness! But when somebody took a interest in the food that was sent up to them, why you liked to show as you was not a perfect fool! I had taken a deep and mournful interest in the food that was sent up to me before now; but she ignored this.

All these improvements alarmed me not a little. Suppose Miss Z. began to take an interest in the only person now left outside the sphere of her beneficence?

Fear was awake and astir.

Jealousy awoke next.

To the backyard a cat was wont to come, the only thing on four legs that ever had come willingly to me.

Now there are cats and cats. To say "cat" is as indefinite as if one said "A man."

There is the Gray Cat, the Cat of Egypt, a goddess calm and smooth and careless of mankind, fascinating, as certain women are, from utter indifference. She inherits the stately and gracious manners, the lofty reserve of a long line of ancestors, one of whom, no doubt, gazed with gold eyes upon the Pharaoh of the Exodus. It is a privilege to look after a cat like that.

There is the Persian, redolent of Omar, catching, if ever she caught anything at all, nothing inferior to a bulbul; fed, like the Roman gluttons, upon the tongues of nightingales. "Is she not an angel?" I have heard my cousin cry enthusiastically, as the chosen of her hearth stood up and waved a tail as big as a Turk's head. But my cousin was wrong. The angels have nothing feline about them. "Where there are birds there are angels."

That cat is a Sphinx, like her sister of Egypt.

There is the White Cat, dear to fairy tale, amiable, gentle, not so fond of her claws as other cats—a perfect lady.

There is the Black Cat, green-eyed, not a single spot of snow on her breast. Why she, of all cats, should be considered lucky, I have never been able to imagine. She brings with her a Faust-like sense of expeditions on a broomstick, of the revels of witches out for the night on their unsabbatical Sabbath.

The Back Street Cat was none of these. It was an outcast cat, a cat with a past, a cat whose paw was against every other cat. Pity for its forlorn condition one rainy day induced me to set out a saucer of the stuff called “milk” which Mahry brought me with my tea. I never talked *cat* to it. I am not good at languages, though very fond of them. But I named it Katerfelto, and by and by it answered to that name. The landlady kept it only because she kept mice. If it did not get enough mouse to eat, that was not her

fault, for there were plenty on the premises : but it looked thin and jagged, and I think she threw boots at it. I cannot say that it became a friend, but it was less of an enemy to me than other cats. We established an armed neutrality—at least I did, for Katerfelto was armed rather than neutral, and showed his claws whenever I showed my hand. He had forgotten how to purr, if ever he knew how, but he swore like a trooper, and I believe he knew that I liked to hear him swear at the landlady. He never swore at me. At night, when he was in good voice, he sat upon the roof and sang. Then, indeed, I have awaked to find myself wishing that Katerfelto were dead.

One day he did not come as usual for milk. I thought perhaps he had gone a-hunting. He did sometimes ; but then he always returned an hour or two later. As he never came at all, I questioned the landlord.

“ It’s Miss Z., sir,” said he. “ She takes a interest in cats, sir.”

He offered to fetch Katerfelto for me, but I declined. I was not going to have the cast-

off cats of Miss Z. to tea when she was tired of them. She must be very fond of cats to have grown fond of Katerfelto.

Next day—it was the day we heard of the relief of Kimberley—I was in high spirits, having just telegraphed the news to my cousin, whose boy was in the Relief Force. As I came in at the door, I saw a beautiful cat walking downstairs with great dignity, a “Union Jack” ribbon tied round its neck in a bow. It had been brushed and combed until its tabby fur stood round its head in a ruff. It looked all but a Persian. With difficulty I recognised my old acquaintance.

“Why, Katerfelto!” I said; and Katerfelto rubbed himself against my legs and purred.

“Persica!” cried a voice from above.

Katerfelto jumped upstairs, two steps at a time.

“I beg your pardon,” I said primly, addressing space, “but that cat’s name is Katerfelto.”

“I daresay it *was* Katerfelto,” said the voice, “but it’s going to be Persica now.

Purrsica — *PU* double *R*—I taught her to purr yesterday.”

“Allow me to point out,” I said, “that this is a Tom-cat.”

“That can’t be helped,” said the same voice. “I’ve called it Persica.”

b I never heard mere air, converted into word of mouth, sound so decided. There was the noise of a door shut.

I felt annoyed. I persuaded myself that I was really fond of Katerfelto—that I resented the attitude of the *fâcheuse troisième* who had thrust herself between us. He never came near me after that. He always went up to tea with Miss Z. I believe she gave him cake.

Mahry had become another girl. The landlord had become another man. Katerfelto had become another cat.

The change in my landlady alarmed me more than all the other changes put together. Even the landlady had changed. Nothing remained unchanged except myself.

Alarm and jealousy increased. I entertained a nervous terror of Miss Z.

II

POSITIVE aversion was the next stage.

Bump—thump—bump—thump—bump—thump—what was that going upstairs?

“If it were to come down,” I said to myself, “it would come down like the Ode of Klopstock that Heine heard, tumbling from the top storey to the bottom. Good gracious! what can it be?”

I rang the bell.

No one came.

I rang again, after a fashion to let people know that an angry man was ringing. My landlord appeared, very much out of breath.

“I beg your parden, sir,” said he, “I was a-helping of Miss Z.’s pianner into her room.”

She had a piano then, and it was her piano

that went upstairs like that. “Light as fairy foot can fall”—she had a piano.

She let me know it too. That evening—it was a Thursday—without a single preliminary chord that might have suggested what was coming—she struck up Chopin’s Funeral March.

Now, if I have a weakness for anything on this earth, it is for Funeral Marches. The only fault I have to find with them is, that they do not last. No one is ever half long enough being buried to please me; and they do not begin soon enough neither. In my opinion, a Funeral March ought to begin like death itself—suddenly, majestically, without preparation. Thus it began when Lucilla played. She struck into the mighty chords without any preface or prelude.

I sat with bowed head, listening.

We had heard that day of the relief of Ladysmith. I had been living lightly but unsteadily, fluttered by an excitement that was too giddy for joy. After the long interminable months of waiting—after the fury of

grief as one attempt failed after the other—my brain reeled, I think, at the tidings of success. I was not the only one.

The huge placards—the shouts—the flags—the chiming bells—the signals, roused a wild passion of vanity that shamed me after an hour or two, as if I had drunk champagne when I ought rather to have fallen upon my knees. It was not that I had forgotten the dead, but I had wilfully turned away from the quiet place of their rest. Now, at the touch of a hand that I had never seen, they came back. At the touch of a hand that I had never seen, my solemn rejoicing in their glory stilled the feverish clatter of triumph, unworthy thinking men, that had possessed me. I looked again at the little figure of Gordon above my mantelpiece. I thought of one lying far off among the sands of Egypt.

All the next day I buoyed myself up with the hope that Chopin's Funeral March would begin again in the evening, I heard the dead leaves blowing over him as I sat at work

among my musty books and papers—dead leaves too, but of another kind.

There is this about a mechanical occupation, that it sets the mind free to follow her own bent when business hours are over. Often have I envied the artist, the musician, the literary man, whose business is his pleasure. Yet it is not the musician who most enjoys the music. He knows too well—for himself and even for another—the agony of failure. Fingers too cold or too hot—feelings too hot or too cold. You may praise him up to the skies, but he has not earned his own approval. Comfort him if you can! What is the hideous clapping noise of a thousand hands to him who has heard the music of the spheres and rendered it wrongly? If it were not for his bread and butter, poor wretch, he would rather be hissed! The artist, if he sees beauty beyond our ken, frets himself often almost to death because others are blind and do not care to buy that which it is more than meat and drink to him to paint. Even the literary man, to whom his

books are daily breakfast, dinner, and supper, does not know the taste of a book as he does who has been kept from it for nine hours out of sixteen.

As soon as I could get free—and never had the office appeared to demand more attention—I hurried home to be in readiness for the funeral.

Dinner ended, I threw myself into an arm-chair, put my feet on the fender and prepared to pass into another world.

I looked at the little statue of Gordon, and I waited. Alas! a piano listened for bursts into song no sooner than a watched pot boils! The hour came and went—the piano remained dumb.

The next night came, and the next night. Still the piano kept silence.

Did it never sound except when a siege was raised?

The rest of the week passed, as many weeks of the wonderful thing called *life* do pass, in a blank heedlessness. I have no recollection of it. A strong conviction forced itself upon me,

that I should hear that piano again on the day week that followed the relief of Ladysmith. As nine o'clock drew near I could hardly control my eagerness. Lucilla had begun at five minutes to nine a week ago. I sat by my fire under the shadow of Gordon, listening, listening.

Nine o'clock struck.

Still never a note.

Half-past nine.

I could bear it no longer.

I knew now that I could not sleep till I had heard that Funeral March once again. Perhaps Miss Z. was not at home! When this thought flashed across me I grew desperate, and summoned assistance.

"Mahry," I said, "is Miss Z. at home?"

"Yiss, sir," said Mahry. (She now said "sir.")

"Be so kind as to take her up this note, and to wait for the answer."

The note ran thus :

"The gentleman downstairs presents his compliments to the Lady on the Drawingroom floor. He would be

greatly obliged if she would favour him with a repetition of Chopin's Funeral March."

The answer descended after an interval that, measured by the clock, appeared short. It was written in pencil, in a clear, bold hand, that asked for plenty of paper. There were no stops of any kind, but the words were spaced so that the meaning was clear.

"The Lady on the Drawingroom floor presents her compliments and she will be happy to play Chopin's Funeral March again if the Gentleman Downstairs will kindly mention the name of the hero in whose honour he would desire it played. She cannot play it except in memory."

Here was a crux. I wondered whether the lady had an accurate mind. Her fingers were accurate enough; but her ideas? Was she the kind of person likely to have a Dictionary of Dates at hand? I decided to risk it. There was no time to be lost. I have observed that women, even women who know about history, do not as a rule read the Peninsular War.

"To-day," I wrote (Heaven and the Duke forgive me) "is the anniversary of the death of the Fiery Crawford."

For all I knew, it might just as well have been the anniversary of the death of Robert Bruce, but I dared not risk that, for she might have been better acquainted with Robert Bruce. Apparently she was satisfied, for, in a few minutes, a tremendous chord fell plump upon my ear. It was not Chopin, however. When I came to know that piano better, I learnt that it would never play the same air twice in succession. This was at once heavier and more electric ; it suggested to my mind a funeral among the hills and in the mist. I heard the drums all night long.

The Lady on the Drawingroom floor and the gentleman downstairs were now on thinking, rather than on speaking, terms with each other. We did not meet face to face. She had heard my voice—in contradiction. I was aware that she spoke with the refinement of a woman who reads, and with a certain quality of decision which proclaimed at once that she was born to be king. Her fingers were more eloquent than her lips. She told the piano

what she thought, and the piano told me. I did not reason it out. I knew she felt as I did about those who have died worthily. From that time forward there was a link, forged by the dead, between us. Fearful of breaking it, of finding out that words could break a sympathy deeper than words, I had no wish to talk with her. It was to me as if she had known him whom of all others I counted dear. I did not care to be told what I knew very well, that she had never even heard his name.

So far as I could make out, few people came to see Lucilla, but those who came stayed a long time. Sometimes I heard a bell ring and the door opened. An hour or more would pass before the door opened again ; and no bell rang in the meantime.

I came to know, later on, that Lucilla never mingled nor confused her friends. It takes two to make one ; it takes three to make two ; in this sense she understood arithmetic. To say the same thing in another way, she had the precious gift of holding each friend

in himself to be the only friend she possessed for the time being. Sensitive people are flattered thus—flattered even more successfully than they are flattered by other sweet women whose besetting virtue it is, to try and make every friend of theirs the friend of an earlier friend.

I learnt also that she was not quite such a recluse as I at first imagined. Most likely I did not hear her play on the long dark evenings between Chopin's Funeral March and the Funeral March Among the Mountains, because she was entertaining some one with the sound of his own voice, or because she had gone out to hear some one else talk. This explanation dawned on me at a large, unwieldy dinner-party in my cousin's house, to which I went, because, an invited guest having failed, she came herself and commanded my attendance in terms that did not admit of refusal. I was most unwilling to go. Suppose Lucilla took it into her head to play the Funeral March that evening? But "I want a man!" my cousin said, and bitter

experience had taught me that my cousin—unlike her country—never wanted a man but she got one.

The youngest daughter of the house, a tall, pale Maypole of sixteen summers, who had to be encouraged to take her proper part in society, fell to my share. I looked forward with dread to the innumerable little bits of meat and pudding which, by order of her Mamma, we should be compelled to accept or refuse together. I am very much of Hazlitt's mind as regards a young girl. If she giggles, I detest her. If she is not shy, I do not like her. Shyness is the natural condition of a young girl, as it is of a fawn. At the same time I find her shyness dull and infectious. I do not know that any outside person could have made up his mind as to whether Frida was most afraid of me, or I of Frida.

Having discussed soup, fish, and the first *entrée* in almost unbroken silence, Frida, moved, I fear, by the fact that from the end of the table, her mother "gave her a

look," made a sudden determined frightened rush.

"Cousin Oliver," she said, "are you a Wagnerian?"

She had heard a lecture by the distinguished musical critic of *The Times*, it appeared, and she thought that the whole duty of a man was to be a Wagnerian.

"I think I must be a Wagnerian," I said. "I heard a Funeral March the other night, and it was not like any other funeral march I ever heard, so I suppose it was Wagner's. Most certainly I admired it."

"Was it like this?" she asked, and she actually beat the drum on the table-cloth with her little unformed pink fingers.

"Yes," I said encouragingly, "it was just like that."

In my heart I apologised to Lucilla as I spoke.

"Then it was Siegfried's Funeral March," she cried joyfully. "You heard it on the orchestra, of course."

"No—a piano."

“ Who was playing ? ”

“ Nobody that you know. A fellow lodger of mine, a Miss Z.”

Frida's expression changed in an instant.

“ Oh, Miss Z.,” she cried, and broke off. It was as if she were lighting candles before a shrine and swinging incense. She asked no more questions. An intimation was conveyed to me, somehow or other, that I had uttered a name that was, in her eyes, too sacred for discussion ; but she was attentive and kind throughout the evening only because I lived under one roof with Miss Z.

After dinner the conversation turned again upon music. They never talked of anything else in that house, except dancing.

“ Were you at the Pop last Saturday, Mrs. Hopgood ? ” enquired a fatuous dark young man, rather stout, with too many rings on, and eyes that were like bad rings. “ I heard your daughter mention Miss Z. at dinner. I saw her there. Awfully taking woman she is.” He broke off as though he could have said much more but that he was too

far in Miss Z's. confidence, or she too far in his.

“Charmin’!” echoed a fair young fellow of whose prowess at cricket I had often heard. “Met her at Lady Dartry’s the other night.”

And he, too, broke off meditatively, as who should say, “I know something about *her*!” or “She knows something of the utmost importance about *me*.”

I have heard my cousin assert, not without gentle malice, that she had begun to make a list of the gentlemen she met, each of whom wished it to be understood that he was the only intimate friend of Miss Z., and that in the course of a month the names ran up to forty. I can believe this, although my cousin’s statements are not always made upon oath. Lucilla gave to every one who crossed her threshold a sense of intimacy. She made no acquaintances; either she did not know people at all, or she knew them well. The sense of intimacy, however, had nothing to do with what she said, and I doubt whether the visitors who went away

well content knew her so well as they thought they knew her. She seldom either asked or answered questions, disdaining the cheap and obvious methods to which common minds have recourse in the effort to understand. She took the trouble to think over everyone in whom she felt interested, as if he had been a carpet, a wall-paper, or a piece of needle-work—with surprising results.

Women varied more in their opinion of her than men. They were not spellbound like the young girls—like the weak members of the stronger sex; quite the reverse.

“Rather too fond of having her own way, don’t you think?” said my cousin.

As Miss Z. lived by herself, I did not see whose way she could have had except her own. True, she might have had the landlady’s way! That she did not adopt, and the landlady had grown censorious in consequence. But the landlady caught a bad cold a few days before this dinner-party. Miss Z. (I heard it from my landlord, who was impressed with the quality of the dish) went

down into the kitchen and made arrowroot for her. After that the landlady fell silent. This rather annoyed me at the time ; it was unlike the idea that I had formed of Lucilla that she should do anything useful, and there was too distinct a moral about it. I began to see in imagination regiments of *ci-devant* landladies who had “seen better days” marching up to receive flannel petticoats and packets of tea and sugar ; and I felt certain that I should have to give notice. I hate the Ministering Angel kind of woman. I like the flower, the star, the fancy.

I was recalled from these meditations by the voice of my cousin as she stirred up the white cat with her foot.

“Is she well off ? ”

“I do not know. I should not think so, as she lives in Back Street.”

“She is very independent,” said my cousin, who likes to confer a benefit. “Sir Simon Smear, who is, of course, an R.A., recommended her to me as the best person he knew for copying miniatures. So I asked her to

do Aunt Sally—you know, Oliver, Aunt Sally with the red hair, who used to give us rice puddings on Sunday, because it was good for the complexion. She did it well, I daresay, but she took a long time over it, and her charges are enormous ; so I gave Uncle John to little Miss Twitter. It may not be quite such a pretty picture, but then Miss Twitter got it done in three days, and she was so pleased to be asked to stay to luncheon. It kills two birds with one stone, you know, because Miss Twitter is very poor. I am surprised to find that Miss Z. has so many acquaintances. I should hardly have thought she was in a condition to dine out.”

Secretly I felt glad to learn that Miss Z. was independent. She might condescend to work now and then, because she liked to paint and could paint well ; and if she did she would insist on proper remuneration. As I remembered the stately strains that floated down to me from the drawingroom floor, I could not think of her as a poor little harassed, down-trodden drudge like Miss

Twitter. I had seen Miss Twitter, and I had seen Miss Twitter's miniatures.

"Her clothes are so peculiar," the critic went on.

"Indeed! Does she sport a turban?"

"Did you never see her?"

"I have not had that pleasure."

"How odd, when you live in the same house! Oh! well, I daresay you would not have noticed anything! Men have no eyes."

This, by the way, is the only remark about men that all the women I know have concurred in making.

"Tell me, my dear cousin, you who have such surpassing eyes, what it is that they see when they see Miss Z.?"

"Oh, I can't answer that kind of question!" said my cousin. "She wears coral—and nobody wears coral nowadays. And a big cameo brooch, a Roman cameo, the size of a frying-pan. And a little close bonnet that fits tight to the head. It's very becoming; I daresay she trimmed it herself."

"She is clever, then?"

“Oh, no, not in the least! She did not even know where Wilton Place was when someone mentioned it the other day.”

I pondered over Lucilla's old-fashioned ornaments, over her coral and her cameo brooch, as I walked homewards. Inherited, of course. It seemed to me that she wore these things because she liked them. We have all our weaknesses; I, nameless thing that I was, felt pleased to learn that Lucilla had a grandmother; that grandmother had had a grandmother, probably.

The thought that Lucilla was poor—even the idea that she might be—was repellent. Surely the piano indicated wealth—unless, indeed, she was one of those, like myself, to whom certain luxuries are more necessary than the needful. Yet she could not be rich. No one would have lived in Back Street who was rich enough to live out of it.

Perhaps she was merely playing at poverty. She was, perhaps, a great lady in hiding. It is an odd game to play at, but people do odd things for amusement, as they do odd things

for money. So long as she was poor by her own will, it made no matter to me. There is all the difference in the world between chosen poverty and poverty that cannot be helped. When Francis of Assisi took Lady Poverty to wife, he was richer than the head of the Rothschild family; but poverty, when she is not treated as a lady, poverty unsought, unclaimed, struggled against, degrades the poor like some insidious illness of the brain.

I speak of the only class of which I have personal knowledge—of the genteel poor; not of those who are born and die in the slums. When I reflect on the life of these last, I am filled with panic-stricken admiration—I am standing at the bar on the Day of Judgment, without defence. Their very vices put me to shame.

Only drunk? Only dishonest?

The Pharisee who saw a man going by to be hanged, and said to himself, “There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bunyan!” had not eyes to see that the man who was going to be hanged was probably the better

off of the two. He had no vanity, poor fellow, no ridiculous "appearance" to keep up in the eyes of his brother men !

The ideas of the genteel poor and of the poor who are not genteel are very different.

The genteel poor do everything that they can to conceal their poverty, short of telling a lie *in words*. They will go out to dine to hide the fact that they have no dinner at all.

I have done it myself.

They will spend hours sitting in a cold, stuffy Museum, or tramping the streets, because they would rather people did not know that the coals have all but come to an end, and there is no money to buy more.

I have done it myself.

They shut themselves up in their poverty and make an excuse of it not to help others, when, if they were as rich as Cræsus, they would not help.

I have done it myself.

But they will never tell a lie *in words*.

Now the poor who are not genteel have no regard for truth *in words*. They look upon

her as she is *in love*. They will say they are poorer than they are, if they see the slightest advantage in doing so. They have their want-of-all-things in common, they make an excuse of it to help each other everywhere.

I could not nurse a foul, foul-tempered old woman for eight weeks, without ever taking my clothes off, any more than I could tell a lie to earn sixpence; but I am glad, and for the sake of humanity, I am proud to take the part of the hundreds of men and women who can, against myself—to own that this exaggerated love of literal truth is a poor thing as compared with the love of my neighbour. There is much about my neighbour in the Ten Commandments and little about truth, except as it concerns him. All virtue is involuntary. “Here stand I, God help me, I can no otherwise!” It is virtuous to speak the truth—well and good; but between the man who speaks the truth because he cannot help it, and the man who is the slave of others because he

cannot help it, there is a great gulf fixed, although both are virtuous. The slave is on a higher level than the other. I cannot choose, the choice was never granted me. I follow the cold and blue star, Truth—not the red star of Love. I cannot follow another man's nor he mine. I can, I must admire the beauty of his following; but he does not enjoy my society, nor I his.

III

ONE day, when I came home from work, I found a tortoise on the hearth-rug. There it stood with its head straight out, as if it had stood there since the beginning of the world.

Words fail me to describe my embarrassment. In silence, though not in tears, I gazed at it for some time. At last I poked it with my stick.

The tortoise might have been stone-dead for all the notice that it took. Still I made no doubt that it was alive, horridly alive; if I ventured to read a book or write a letter, it would begin to crawl about.

I sat down and watched it; but it did nothing at all. At last the situation became unendurable. I rang the bell.

“Mahry!” I said, “where did that tortoise come from?”

Mahry shrank away towards the door with an expression of agony.

“Don’t you ask me for to touch it, sir!” said Mahry in a smothered scream. “I can’t abear them reptiles. I’d rather meet a lion any day. I couldn’t touch him, no, not with a pair of tongs—no, not if you was to offer me £5, sir!”

She took a corner of her apron, as if prepared for tears, and backed out of the door.

Now Mahry was not in the least likely to meet a lion any day—nor did I wish her to remove the reptile with a pair of tongs—nor could I, in the state of my finances, have offered her £5 for this important service. Whether I should have taken it myself, had any one offered me so much on condition that *I* removed the tortoise, I do not know. My sentiments—bar the encounter with the lion—were exactly the same as those of Mahry.

Still, helpless as she appeared to be, I felt

myself obliged to recall her. I could not be left alone with that beast.

“Mahry,” I said, “it is your fault. You must have left the door open when you brought in the tea; otherwise this most untoward event would not have occurred. Whose is the tortoise?”

“Please, sir, it’s Miss Z.’s tortoise, sir, which she bought it off of a man in the street this morning, sir.”

“Did she indeed? She hardly intended to make a present of it to me, I suppose. Is she at home?”

“Naow, sir.”

Mahry was edging towards the door.

It is all very well to have a musician on the drawingroom floor, but I had not the slightest desire to see a menagerie established there.

“If Miss Z. cannot keep the tortoise upstairs,” I observed, “I shall give it back to the man in the street.”

I wondered, as I spoke, whether it would be possible to find him before Miss Z. came

home. There are so many men in the street.

“Yiss, sir,” said Mahry, getting still nearer the door.

“Kindly give her this note as soon as she returns,” I said, and indited the following:—

“The gentleman downstairs has received a visit from a Tortoise, which belongs, he is told on good authority, to the Lady on the Drawingroom floor. As he is not accustomed to receive Tortoises, he is unacquainted with the etiquette to be observed on such occasions. Would Miss Z. be so kind as to tell him what is the next move? For the Tortoise makes none.”

Tea was impossible. I might, at any moment, find the thing on my knee. I took a book, sat down opposite it, and longed for the return of Miss Z. as a sleepless invalid for the approach of morning. I could not read. Once I began; but the tortoise put its head out a little further. I tried to write

a letter ; but then the tortoise drew its head back.

I began to wonder how old it was.

I remembered, under a glass case at Lambeth, certain remains of a venerable tortoise that had played with Archbishop Laud. This present tortoise now before me might have heard the voice of Strafford at Whitehall. Rupert of the Rhine might have stroked its back ; it had, perhaps, accepted a dandelion from the white hand of Henrietta Maria. I did not suppose it had anything to do with the Puritans. Tortoises are, I feel sure, Erastian and cavalier.

In the midst of these reflections I heard a key turn, and the front door opened.

Miss Z. had a latch-key, then, a boon constantly denied to me since I lost the three first and refused to pay a pound for the fourth. There was a momentary pause. Mahry, no doubt, was presenting my note. The next instant Miss Z. might be upon me. I had never thought of that. I was beginning to feel that even the society of the tortoise

might be less embarrassing, when I heard her go calmly along the hall and up the stairs.

If I had been alarmed lest she should come, I was now twice as much alarmed lest she should not. I could not spend the evening with that creature. I made up my mind that I should go out to dine.

Suddenly, however, Mahry reappeared, grim, determined, armed with a black tea-tray.

“ Well ? ”

“ Miss Z. says I'm to bring the 'orrible reptile upstairs at onest,” said Mahry, in a voice which convinced me that she would have laid her now tidy head on the block in a second, if Miss Z. had required it.

She put the tray down on the rug, and proceeded to urge the tortoise on to it by the application of the shovel behind. He stood upon the order of his going, but go he did. I dare be sworn he went upstairs much faster than he came down. Once he had crossed the Rubicon, and was safely landed on the tray, Mahry dropped the shovel as if it had

been red-hot, and fled to the Drawingroom floor as though a policeman were at her heels.

A note came to hand five minutes later.

“The Lady on the Drawingroom floor regrets that Barnaby Rudge should have caused the Gentleman Downstairs inconvenience She will know better how to restrain him in future ”

She kept her word. Rudge never darkened my doors again.

It was long, however, before I got over a nervous fear that he might.

Some time after, having been without news for a longer period than usual, I inquired what had become of him.

“He has disappeared,” said Lucilla. “Tortoises always do. I have had three, and they all disappeared.”

This comforted me, and I inquired no further.

It seemed appropriate. Barnaby Rudge could not have taken such a definite step as to die. No ; like many a tyrant before him, he “disappeared.”

Lucilla showed, on this occasion, all the kindly indifference that has often amazed me in people who devote themselves to pets. They will behave as if the adored object were the only thing in life that deserved their affection; they will sacrifice their own comfort and the comfort of others remorselessly, to attend to its lightest want; but when it "disappears" they accept the fact with a philosophy for which their previous warmth has not prepared one. Their very sympathy with animals gives them, I believe, a touch of the indifference of animals over the inevitable. I do not forget that Sir Walter Scott refused to dine out on the night of his dog's death; and I have myself seen Lucilla unable to speak when—but I anticipate.

IV

FOR a few days after the Rudge Raid there was peace.

Often of an evening Lucilla talked to the piano, and the piano talked to me. I used to wonder afterwards what it was that she said—I wondered what she looked like as she said it.

If I myself could have remained unseen, I should have wished to see her. She was, I fancied, small, fair, dignified as becomes the little women who rule ; alarmingly, yet rather charmingly reserved.

Complexion—ivory, stained with faint rose-leaf. Eyes — blue, Irish gray, something between :—

“ Eyes too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be gray.”

Well-plaited hair, and plenty of it. I have

not the indifference professed by Benedick as to the colour of a lady's hair. Black hair is disagreeable to me ; there should be nothing black about a lady. If it had pleased Heaven that her hair should be black, I could not but feel disappointed.

I was pondering over her appearance one afternoon when a loud and very hoarse voice, a dreadful travesty of my own, said, close to my ear, "*Mahry, shut the door !*"

There, on the back of my chair, sat a little green parrot, and, without any more ado, he walked on to my shoulder, where he began to sing "Tom Bowling's gone aloft."

"I'll not have you calling me Mahry, nor Tom Bowling neither. You'll go aloft yourself—and very shortly !" I said with decision ; and marched upstairs, taking no time to consider.

If I had hesitated one moment, I should have been lost, but the firm grasp of the parrot's claws, rooted in my coat, gave me confidence, and I knocked at the first door on the landing.

“Come in !” said the voice there was no disobeying : and I turned the handle.

That is a strange moment when we see for the first time one at whom we have looked hitherto with the eye of the mind alone. I remained dumb. She was not in the least what I expected.

She was tall—taller than myself. She was pale, not as those are whose roses have faded, but as those who are born under an alien star. She was dark, and her hair—black hair—curved like a shell as it rose on either side above her great calm forehead. She had large dark eyes. Whether they were softer than they were deep—deeper than they were soft, I never knew ; they had not the penetrating look that makes one so uncomfortable in the presence of some women. She never seemed to be reading her interlocutor as if, *faute de mieux*, she were reading a book. There was distance in her eyes ; they appeared to be resting on things beautiful exceedingly, but far, far away. Whether the image reflected in them were of the past or of the future, who

could tell? Of both perhaps; for what was will be.

Thus she stood for an instant, gazing. But when she really saw the sight before her there was a sudden change, the change that comes on water ruffled by the wind. She did not laugh aloud, but she covered her face with her hands, and her stately form shook.

There is nothing (except fear) more infectious than laughter. We laughed in company—we laughed for several minutes before a word was spoken. After that she made a perch of her finger, coaxed the little parrot away, put him back in his cage, and thanked me as well as she could for laughter.

“It is a great mistake to have pets,” she said, “especially other people’s. You never know what they are after. Still, I think I can promise that they will not annoy you for the next half-hour at any rate; they will be too busy eating and drinking. We are all going to drink tea together. Will you not take a cup with us, to show that you bear no malice?”

Therewith she lifted down from a shelf a pretty, half-transparent cup and saucer.

“I dust them every day,” she said apologetically, and we sat down.

Katerfelto was purring over a saucer of milk. Barnaby Rudge was sucking out of another, the parrot waddled down off his perch and began to eat bread and milk from a Japanese bowl. Where a cat, a bird, a tortoise, and a woman, were all comfortable together, why should not a man be happy too?

He was.

A quiet sensation of well-being stole over me, so soon as I felt myself one of their company.

The light, bright, airy room was the perfect expression of the taste of one person, and that person a lady.

Over and over again I have seen a charming room spoilt because too many people have been permitted to adorn it. Unity—purpose—repose—are frittered away by crowds of photographs—the last new baby of the last great friend—the girl the husband’s brother is

engaged to—Sarah Bernhardt dressed as a man—Dan Leno dressed as a woman—the gloomy brows of Kitchener—the amiable tightness of “Bobs.” Lucilla had no photographs in public. In private she had many, but she kept them in a heart-shaped box, covered with blue linen, and suffered no eyes but her own to rest on them, except by special favour. To my mind, she honoured the originals with more delicacy by this exclusive preference. She would not, could not expose them to the common light of day, nor bare the features that she loved to the chance criticism, the flighty admiration of a casual visitor. She did not even think that she herself was always in a fit mood to behold them. She observed times and seasons.

One photograph, however, she displayed, “The Unknown,” Painter Unknown, from the Louvre; and she displayed it in the post of honour, over the fire. There he hung, his eyes full of affection and unrest, his lips disdainful, every inch of his odd face contradicting every other inch of it.

What kind of man was he, I wondered? Why did Lucilla care to have that face—of all the faces in the world—before her?

He was not all of one piece, I think. His virtues would have despaired, had it not been for his vices; and his vices would have had it all their own way, had it not been that, “when he wandered here and there, he then went most aright.”

“You know many things,” I said once to Lucilla. “But even you do not know whether that fellow is in Heaven or in Hell.”

“He is not in Heaven now, but he will be!” she replied with earnestness.

I laughed.

“You speak as if you meant to meet him there.”

“I do!” she said, still in the same serious tone.

We held this conversation long after our first interview, at a time when she went often to the National Gallery under my escort.

“I bet you my Tintoretto—if I had it—to

your Fra Angelico—if you had it—he is in Hell. The mouth is bad.”

“The eyes are good,” she said. She was looking at me as she spoke, not at the portrait.

“Character shows most in the mouth. Our other features are kind to us, and keep the secret. But the mouth is the traitor; and the mouth, I repeat, is bad.”

“You have no call to abuse it,” she rejoined. “It is very like your own.”

To which, of course, there was no answer. When I reached the seclusion of my bedroom, I consulted a looking-glass, and found to my disgust that she was right.

No other face, whether of man or woman, adorned her walls.

Nor was there any sketch, picture, or photograph that could, by any possibility, be made to bear the title of *The Old Home*.

On one wall hung a print; a long, long avenue of thin, tall trees, such as are to be seen in the North of France, an avenue that led straight on to the sky. Beside the mantelpiece hung a tiny sketch of a bit of bough, a

bird with outstretched wings, and—far below—the sea. Unless she were an angel or a mermaid, it would have been rash to come to any conclusion from these as to the place of Lucilla's origin.

The space at her command was doubled by an oval mirror in a frame of carved woodwork. There was a motto underneath, but I took many months to decipher it in the old, unfamiliar lettering. *Hier c'est demain* it ran. What had that mirror reflected yesterday?

In the centre of the mantelpiece, opposite the round mirror, there stood a bronze statuette of Charles George Gordon, the counterpart of that which I possessed. I recognised it with a feeling of pleasure, but without surprise—as if I had known all along that it must be there.

When I went back to my own apartment, it seemed bare and stupid by comparison, wanting alike in definite meaning and in suggestion of the world without. It was also very dusty. Lucilla's looked as if she dusted it morning and evening. I have no doubt she did. Mahry is not fond of dusting. I myself am not so fond of dusting as Mahry.

V

“**Y**OU will come to tea with me again, this day week!” Lucilla had said, without a note of interrogation in her voice, when I rose to take leave. I cannot recollect whether I made any answer. That seemed unnecessary. She decided the matter as she decided every affair, great or little, within her ken; and it became a custom that I should drink two cups of tea and eat one piece of bread-and-butter and two of cake on the Drawingroom floor of a Thursday. Habit makes half the pleasure of meeting; and Lucilla knew this. An occasional visit is a duty to be discharged, but one paid regularly becomes agreeable, even if it was mere duty in the first instance; how much more when the first step cost nothing but a laugh?

I began to find the study of my neighbour one of the pleasantest studies imaginable.

For many years I had cared little about society. The memory of the one friend I had never lost, even by death, was company enough for me.

My lameness sets me at a disadvantage among sportsmen and athletes—the dryness and shyness of my manner is, I have often thought, repugnant to scholars and men of taste.

Even if I could move about as others do, I doubt that I should have had the strength of mind to fish or to shoot. I should have been the salmon, plunging and dashing in his efforts to escape; I should have been the fluttering wounded bird, the terrified hare. I have enjoyed a fight now and then. I enjoyed very keenly the fight in which I was lamed for life; but I cannot enjoy a struggle in which I am myself on the weaker side. I have seen, now and then, a human being look out of the eyes of an animal—as I have seen that more dreadful thing, an animal looking out of the

eyes of a human creature. It is perhaps because I am weaker in body than a man should be, that anything yet weaker always seems to me like a woman. I have none of the huntsman's instinct concerning Woman neither. I have seen men who regarded her as a superior kind of game; and I have seen her look upon them as huntsmen—whom she could sometimes hunt. It filled me with inexplicable shame. Diana must hunt, I suppose, though I would rather she did not; but all the laws of forestry are against our hunting Diana.

Why I should care to defend Woman in this way, I know not. Strength for strength, some women are stronger than the strongest men. Lucilla was one of these.

At first I only saw her quality in negatives. She was never *in extremis*. She did not say "Good gracious!" when "Dear, dear!" would do just as well. She neither scolded nor complained. She controlled enthusiasm as if it were a spirited horse that must not be allowed to run away with her. She ruled her ardent sympathies in the same way; and

thus she kept herself from entangling the threads of the many friendships that she held in her hand.

She did not surprise me much ; but she surprised me constantly in little things.

On the second Thursday when she did me the honour to invite me, we sat long over the tea-table in the long, late spring twilight. During the pause that followed on some remark of mine that gave her reason to meditate, I suddenly became aware of a little fat hand resting on the coverlet of the sofa. Something beneath it stirred, it was thrust lower down, there lay revealed a babe of about three years old, so sound asleep that I had not noticed her from the time I came in.

A cat—a tortoise—a parrot—and now a baby : what should I find living in that room next ? Whose baby could it be ? The creature was pretty enough ; but I felt instant disapproval.

Lucilla, who is quick to detect any change in a companion, looked round and smiled.

“It’s only little ‘Liza!” she said defensively. “I call her Betsinda—Betty for short; and when she is a very good girl, Tricksy Wee. She’s the landlady’s little niece. I don’t encourage her. I am not fond of children. But she has taken a kind of fancy to me. She crept upstairs all by herself, and, of course I could not turn her away. She was sitting by my side on a stool, looking at pictures, for an hour before you came. She is as good as gold, I must say that for her, but she got drowsy, so I just laid her down to sleep her sleep out. Her Aunt will come to fetch her presently, and take her home.”

“How very dreadful for her to have an aunt like that!” I observed.

“Not at all!” said Lucilla. “The landlady likes her better than anything else in the world.”

For my own part, I felt certain that the tiresome baby would wake up and scream. It did nothing of the kind, however, and in a few minutes I had forgotten its exis-

tence. On the whole it caused less interruption than the parrot; and at any rate it did not crawl like the tortoise.

“A wonderfully good child!” I said, as I rose to depart.

“Children are not naughty with me,” said Lucilla. “I don’t make a fuss with them.” And tenderly she laid the little hand, that had grown cold, under the coverlet.

In the solitude of my room downstairs, I wondered why she had no children of her own.

She said she did not like them, it is true, but—though she was a woman of her word—if ever I saw Theory go one way and Practice another, I saw it now. In theory she did not like pets any better than children. She had only taken care of Katerfelto because it was a public disgrace to see such a neglected looking animal about the house. She had only bought the tortoise because the man had too many tortoises on his cart, and there was no room for them to move, and she chanced to have a shilling in her pocket. There was some other

explanation—I forget what—of the parrot. He belonged to a friend who did not understand him, I believe. Betty, of course, explained herself. I did not wonder that she came upstairs.

She seemed to have no relations; that was another thing I liked about Lucilla, though I found it hard to understand, because, in the rest of my experience, women of large sympathy have been women with large families. She was never full of satisfaction because dear Tom's wife had got a little boy—never mournful and abstracted because Hetty's fifth daughter looked white and thin, and nobody could make out what was the matter. She pursued the even tenour of her way, quite unaffected by domestic incident of any kind.

Nor did she adopt a whole parish instead of a family, as many single women do. "All the world is my parish!" Wesley said; and I have often thought "My parish is all the world!" must be their motto. She did not take a motherly

interest in telegraph boys, in Deep Sea fishermen, in cinder-sifters, in the inhabitants of Sierra Leone. She disclaimed a motherly interest in anybody or anything. Somehow or other, animals and children insisted on making her their mother. She always carefully assured me that it was not her fault.

She had an almost morbid horror of official charity, and I have it on her own authority that she seldom gave more than twopence in church.

“Money is a hard thing,” I heard her say once. “It does more harm than good unless you wrap it up in soft words—or a warm jacket—or something to eat and drink. It is only a stone itself—not bread—not anything a man can live on.”

Her ideas about time were as unconventional as her ideas about money.

She did more, and she did what she did more thoroughly than anybody, man or woman, whom I have known. Yet she was always at leisure. She seemed to keep a

private supply of time on hand. She laughed once about a motto that she had seen over a clockmaker's shop, "Time is Money." The clockmaker did not take the responsibility of it; he put the name of *Campbell* underneath.

"To think that anyone can talk such nonsense!" she said, "let alone the man who wrote 'The Battle of the Baltic.' People who have time never have money. All the rich people hurry and hurry from morning to night. Why, even I might have money if I had no time!"

"Time is thought," I said, "but it cannot be thought and it cannot be money, both at the same moment. And you want time to think, more than you want money."

"Time is tea-time," she rejoined. "I want my tea, and so do you."

For a woman who delighted in thought, she was oddly shy about talking of it.

"I like to talk over the thoughts of other people. I always feel as if I were telling lies about my own," she said.

Dull talk put her out. She did not think it in the least worth while to talk of any thing dull.

“Life is short,” she said. “I have no time for kettle-holders.”

An instance of a theory long held by me, that proverbs are the invention of Woman, on the spur of the moment. They must generalise; to them nothing is unrelated. I wondered that she thought life short. To me it appeared long—not that I wished it shorter.

When she went out, it was not so much her talk that I missed as her music—and above all, her silence. The other women whom I know are ceaselessly occupied. Their heads must be working, or their hands. They must have something to show for the time spent. Lucilla insisted on large clear spaces of doing nothing. She would scarcely answer some remark of mine, but she would sit still, brooding, and at the end of many moments there shone into my mind a light that came from hers. For

the most part she compelled me to answer my own questions, though how she did this I hardly know—oftener by a look or a gesture than by any words, I think.

Those great brown eyes of hers—and mine—were made upon a different pattern; and, though we might be sitting side by side, one always saw what the other did not.

“That inner eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude”

was in her so clear and direct that, with her outer eyes, she scarcely saw at all.

“Dante is your favourite poet, is he not?” I enquired one evening.

“How did you know? I never let a day pass without a few lines of *The Divine Comedy*,” she rejoined; not as if she were surprised, but rather glad.

Few things astonished her, yet she was full of wonder and reverent admiration. There were times when I thought some strange experience in early life must have left her cold to all passing events ever after. She

kept her marvelling for children—for the old and the poor—for heroic people. At the call of any of these it awoke. I feel sure that in this characteristic lay the secret of her power to confer repose.

“He that wonders shall reign, and he that reigns shall rest.”

“You care for Dante,” I said, “because everywhere in this world he saw the next. Earth to him, is *not* earth; it is Hell, Purgatory, Heaven.”

“I suppose you care more for Shakespeare than for any other poet,” she said with a sigh.

“How did *you* know?”

“People always care for one of those two poets more than for the other. We are only grown-up children; one child likes Hans Andersen better than Grimm, and another likes Grimm the best. They are never equally fond of both. You have read Dante through, and I have not done that, but you do not read him every day as I do.”

This was true. She still looked mournful.

“Why do not you read Shakespeare every day? Shakespeare understood women.”

“He never cared for any woman as Dante cared for Beatrice.”

There she was right, perhaps. Yet her opinion was not founded on study. She would take a tragedy or a comedy, and think, in one afternoon, that she had done with it.

In the earlier days of our friendship I used to speculate as to her origin, as to her history. I did not think that she came from the North, nor yet from the East. She had no liking for cold winds and frost; in the warmth of a soft, wet day she would open out like a flower. I could not but believe that she had been born in the West, where women are tall, gracious, brown-eyed, and the many golden sunsets of their childhood give them a serenity that is not lost in after life. She had lived in a spacious home, I thought, among loaded apple-trees, close to the blue sea, where

September, lingering, crests the hedges with foam of honeysuckle. I often wondered at the space that she gave to her little room. I believed that it held within its narrow walls much larger, airier rooms; in some strange way she made me feel as if I sat or moved in them when I was with her. Yet there was never any word—nor the slightest allusion.

Was the past then indifferent to her? Had she banished all connected with it? Did she exist, “the day to the day,” without a memory? Or was it, like my own, woven and tangled in with the present, so much a part of the tissue of every hour, that it could no more be spoken of than those fleeting, intimate sensations that we cannot make known even to a friend till they are well behind us?

The weeks had two days in them now, Sunday and Thursday. On Sunday Lucilla played—on Thursday I went to tea with Lucilla. She played on other nights; but

on Sunday she played for me, and there was often, "by special request," a Funeral March.

Spring became summer, and summer autumn, and autumn winter, and winter spring again; and this not once but twice.

I began to note the seasons more than I had noted them formerly, because I gave my friend Lucilla flowers. To speak by the book I gave her one flower, and one flower only. I never thought anything but a rose was good enough. In the winter, when roses were scarce, I gave her a bunch of them. In the summer, when there were many, I gave her one. She was no more indiscriminate in her love of flowers than in her love of human beings. She did not fill anything that came to hand with masses of this, that, and the other, jumbled up anyhow. She chose a delicate bowl or cup; a small, fanciful vase—she set them in the best light—against the looking-glass—she played with every blossom as a child plays with a toy. I always thought that flowers lived longer in her room than anywhere else. I said so

to her once, and she replied in the prosiest way that it was because she took the trouble to cut a little piece of the stem off, to slit it at the bottom, to put a scrap of charcoal into the fresh water that she gave them to drink every morning. I felt sorry that she made the mistake of telling me this. Why should she give me rational explanations of things that seemed to me romantic? Afterwards I let such incidents alone, and enjoyed the sense of mystery.

Many are the subtle differences between men and women. I had always understood this in the grand sense. In fact, until I knew Lucilla, I should as soon have thought of making a friend of a Parsee. Women are Fire-Worshippers. This is the great difference: but now, for the first time, I began to know the difference there may be in little things as well as great.

A woman, for instance, will be friends with you, year in, year out, and never feel the need of defining you by any name at all. With me it is otherwise. A dull crystal-

lization of feeling impels me to name my friend always in absence, occasionally in presence. I cannot get on without a name. I used to wish that I had earned the right to call her as I chose, not as the whole world called her. I cannot help thinking that she divined this—that when she spoke of it, she was uttering my thoughts rather than her own.

“I wish,” she said one day, “that we had individual names for each other. We are not the same to every person that we meet. What do you call me when you are by yourself? I am sure you do not call me *Miss Z.*”

“Why should you think that I am so deficient in respect as to call you anything else?”

“You say it awkwardly whenever you have to say it—as if you had forgotten—or were trying to remember. Confess! You call me something else?”

“I call you *Lucilla*,” I said, straight out. “I called you *Lucilla* before I ever saw you.”

She looked surprised—not disagreeably surprised.

“Why?”

“I can invent a reason if you like,” I said. She laughed.

“If you had given me one, I should not have cared. But will you not call me *Lucilla* always? I have no objection to answer to the name, now that I know it. And frankly, *The Lady on the Drawingroom floor*, every time you write a note is becoming tiresome.”

“Must I be always *The gentleman downstairs*?”

“Always!” returned Lucilla, with precision.

VI

“KITTY is coming,” Lucilla said one evening.

“Who is Kitty?” I asked, vaguely alarmed.

“Is she another cat?”

Lucilla’s low, clear laugh murmured round the room.

“No, Kitty is just—Kitty. I will not tell you what she is like. You shall judge for yourself. She will be here the next time that you come.”

“Oh, will she?” said I. “Then I intend to make the most of the time without her.”

And I talked about something else.

As I was going away, however, my fears returned upon me in full force.

“Only tell me one thing,” I said. “Kitty

won't be here always—she is not going to live in the house? ”

“No,” said Lucilla evasively, “not in the house.”

She was going to be here always then.

Of course Lucilla had every right to avail herself of the company of Kitty, if the company of Kitty was what she desired. Nevertheless I felt aggrieved.

Kitty is coming! I pondered again over the words, over the tone in which they had been said. There was something like girlish delight, a kind of triumph in them, as if the coming of Kitty were almost too good to be true. From my heart I wished that she were not coming. Girls are pretty things, but they are hopeless for purposes of conversation. They live in the shining of their own eyes, in their singing voices, and in their dancing feet, but they have no experience of life at all. Why cannot people be satisfied? “*Toujours le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.*” We were very well, as it seemed to me, Lucilla was quite happy.

Why should she care about this girl? But she had spoken in such a way that I could not forget it, and all day, every day, whenever I chanced to be alone, I heard the mockery in my ear, *Kitty is coming*.

At last she came; and I drew breath again. There was nothing to be afraid of, Lucilla would not prefer her company to mine.

“Well?” inquired Lucilla, when we had all drunk tea together and Kitty was gone. She went soon after tea, whether by instinct or by arrangement I did not know at the time. I feel sure now that it was by instinct.

“She is plain,” I said.

“Is she?”

“She is rather dull.”

“Is she?” said Lucilla, still more markedly.

“She seems to me to be just like any other girl.”

“Oh!” said Lucilla.

The quiet depth of her disagreement annoyed me.

When, however, I saw Kitty again, a

week later, I began, to my own surprise, to disagree with myself. At the end of three weeks I felt bound in honesty to let Kitty's protectress know that I had changed my opinion.

"Very uncommon," I remarked, in a tentative manner.

"She is not at all pretty," said Lucilla regretfully, as if she wished to be contradicted, but felt it impossible. "You are right about that. I wish she were more like her mother. And yet"—was it my fancy that Lucilla's voice softened a little? "I was so much pleased to see the likeness to her father—he is the one I know best, you see, that I never noticed it is not pretty until you said so."

"She is very graceful. Her voice is charming. I have never seen any other girl at all like her."

I thought it best to give way all along the line—to attempt no reserves.

Lucilla smiled.

"What are you laughing at?"

“ Shall I tell you what Kitty said of you, the first time that she saw you ? ”

“ Certainly, if you think it will give me pleasure.”

“ ‘ Auntie,’ she said, ‘ he has pale eyes like a fish, and I thought he was deaf and dumb.’ But last night she informed me that you must have looked like Raphael’s Portrait of Himself when you were young, and that you were quite different from any other man she had ever met.”

“ Miss Kitty and I are going to be excellent friends. I can see that.”

“ I hope so,” said Lucilla demurely.

“ We began with being excellent enemies—a very good beginning of friendship between people of different ages,” I said. “ And now that I have made up my mind about her, be so kind as to tell me who is she.”

“ Her mother comes from the border country up North, and her father from Orleans. The aunt with whom I used to live down in Cornwall (I never knew my own father and mother) gave him a start in life.

He had a turn for mechanics, but no money. Now he owns a mill in Yorkshire and gets on well there. He is an old friend of mine. I promised that I would see something of his child. She likes to play and sing—she has come up to London for a year at the Royal College of Music. The mother is a *malade imaginaire*—a very sweet woman and all that, but rather helpless—not able to go about with Kitty. They thought she would be quite happy, lodging next door to me, and so she is, dear child! I shall get her to play to you.”

“How does she play?”

“Not at all in the style of the Funeral March.”

“I shall not like it then.”

“You ought to beware of rash statements by this time,” Lucilla said.

I have often thought a piano one of the strangest things in the world. If it did not stand solid and square in every drawingroom, should we cease to wonder at the magic box that holds within itself so many different voices? When Lucilla's piano spoke for

Kitty, I could hardly believe that the actual material, wooden keys, the metal strings were the same. An elf, I think, had got inside and changed it all.

Kitty preferred to play "out of her head," as she called it. Hers was the one gift that Lucilla lacked—invention; it came naturally to her to extemporise rather than to read or to remember. She neither could nor would play anything at any other person's suggestion. She embroidered the air around her with fanciful grotesques of sound that were, now beautiful exceedingly, now odd to the verge of absurdity. Sometimes this delighted, sometimes it rather distressed Lucilla.

"Her sense of time is not good. And I don't think she practises her scales enough," she observed one day.

I smiled in my turn; for I knew that it was not in Kitty to practise her scales.

There as she sits at the piano—the only place in the world in which she ever, for one minute, could sit still, let me draw her.

I have tried again and again for my own

satisfaction, not with any success—never, to speak truth, with the hope of it, but because there are certain tasks that attract by virtue of impossibility.

As there are some women who cannot be painted with colours, there are others who cannot be described in words. Colour and words suggest something too definite, too strong, too much finished. All the while I am writing a critic is contradicting me ; and I know (women are women's critics) that she is as right as I am.

But that the music her little slender hands are making sways Kitty gently to and fro like a breeze, the wand-like figure would be almost prim in its unrounded, youthful straightness.

“ Too thin ! ” the critic says.

Her hair is like the back of a thrush in colour, soft it may be, but not shining, nor very abundant, and she brushes it up into a bird-like crest.

The forehead ?

“ Low,” the critic says.

Her eyes are grey—and not a pretty grey—too mouse-like, one of them has a speck of brown. I shall leave out her nose and her mouth—the first because I cannot remember it, the last because I remember it too well.

A plague upon this inventory of her features!

When I wished to please Lucilla, I used to say she was a pocket Gainsborough that had not quite succeeded. If that cunning artist had taken it into his head to paint a miniature, he might have given the stiff, maidenly grace, the unconscious candour of some transient attitude that betrayed the elfin spirit. But he must have caught her upon the wing; she could never have sat to him, she could no more sit still than a bird, and when she sang, it was as a bird sings, clearly, sweetly, without a note of passion. I apologise for speaking thus to the nightingale, Romeo of birds, but Kitty had nothing of the nightingale. The lark was her fellow.

From the first she put her foot down on the Funeral Marches.

“No, no, Auntie,” she said. “Don’t play

that, it's too sad. It makes me think of all the dead people. I don't know them. Nobody I loved has died. Nobody shall."

Something in her frightened voice, her frightened eyes, made me turn away.

"Darling," Lucilla said, "that's not the way to think of it. They are not dead really. They are more living than we are."

But Kitty was not to be persuaded. For my part I had more sense than to try and persuade her.

"I want it to be always here, always now," she cried. "Always you. Always father and mother. O Auntie, Auntie, why will you be older than I am?"

"One day you will be just as old yourself, my child."

"Oh dear!" said Kitty. "That makes it better—I never thought of that."

We all three laughed, but Kitty had her way and the Funeral Marches were banished.

"How very old she does think people of our age," Lucilla observed when she was gone.

"She has made me remember my years,

and the number of my days what it is," I said. "I shall go down to my own room and meditate. Miranda was only fifteen when Prospero declared that every third thought should be his grave. I have heard a middle-aged man say that was the right proportion, I daresay Prospero was younger than I am."

Lucilla paid not the slightest attention to this neat Shakespearean essay."

"I cannot bear the child to be frightened," she said. "She would not be so much afraid for us if she were not afraid herself. I never had that fear. I do not understand it. She will be less afraid when she knows what it is—when she has lost some one."

"Will she?" I said. "Do you not think it is a matter of temperament?"

"Perhaps."

Lucilla spoke with courtesy rather than with confidence. I think she distrusted the modern word *temperament* very much as she distrusted the words *heredity* and *environment*. They seemed to her faithless.

“I wish,” she continued, after a minute’s pause, “that some one could teach her how to think more accurately. She lets her feelings run away with her.”

Again I smiled. For I knew that there was more power of accurate thinking in Kitty than in Lucilla, and I was not so sure that if she did begin to think, Lucilla would like it. Kitty had the fatal power of seeing things as they are.

In minor matters, however, she was inaccurate enough, and I am sorry to say she had not the slightest regard for accuracy. She had been taught—or she had chosen of her own accord—to call Lucilla, who was no relation in the world to her, “Auntie.” She had taken the *Unknown*, *Painter Unknown*, over the mantelpiece, for Raphael by Himself, and even after she found out her mistake, she persisted in calling me “Mr. Raph,” because of the fancied likeness that she detected as quickly as Lucilla. I think names meant much to her, for she named everything that she came across.

Katerfelto accepted her as a matter of course. The parrot liked her better than Lucilla, and would sit on her shoulder and lay his gray bill against her cheek. She taught him to say, "How are you?" and was inordinately vain of the achievement. She lost her heart at once to Tricksy Wee, and to my surprise I found myself building card-houses and blowing soap-bubbles to amuse that young person, who had never seemed to want amusing before. She was also much naughtier; Kitty excited her.

Kitty was, of course, devoted to Lucilla; I never met the girl who was not; and as I had formerly profited by Frida's devotion, so now I profited much more by hers. Her pretty feeling for her guardian extended itself to her guardian's friend; and, with a feeling of pleasant wonder, I began to understand what Lucilla had foreseen, I suppose, from the first—that my friendship with her would grow yet more pleasurable from our common interest in the life so much younger than our own.

We were always holding little committees of two on Kitty, her sayings and her doings. Lucilla would half pretend to find some fault. I would defend the absent, and she was not displeased. After our first conversation about her I never attempted independent criticism, nor—to be quite fair—did it occur to me.

“I think the child ought to see some pictures,” Lucilla said one day. “You know all about pictures. I only know the few that I love ; but she ought, of course, to be shown the different Schools. Would it be troubling you too much to ask you to take her to the National Gallery ? ”

I leapt at the offer ; not thinking honestly that Kitty would ever care much about pictures, not minding much whether she did or did not.

She was delighted to come. Her merry nature found mirth in every journey to and fro. Lightly she ran up and down the steps of 'bus after 'bus ; airily she settled beside Lucilla on the top and looked upon the

streets as on a garden, every inch of which had been laid out to charm her.

I could not climb the steps, but in spirit I, too, sat on top. I understood that she could not be caged inside ; and I heard what she said, for Lucilla told me.

It pleased her when she heard her brother man address her brother man as “Now then, Four-Wheel Cab !”

It pleased her to see a carriage full of plump, rosy, fair-haired children—to know that one of them would some day be King of England.

“Just like little fat Cupids,” said she. “What a lovely place London is ! Look at the little darling Cupid on that house ! There is another ! And there’s another !”

I had never seen these Cupids on the houses in Piccadilly before ; it amazed me to find how many there were. Sometimes, as I go past them now, I look for them and think of Kitty. They did not interest Lucilla, but she was kind to them for Kitty’s sake.

When we reached Trafalgar Square, however, such a diversity of tastes became apparent that I wondered whether we should, on any single Saturday morning, find any single picture at which we could all three gaze with satisfaction. The initial difficulties were tremendous.

To begin with, no one could persuade Kitty to look at things in order. You might as well have hoped to persuade a squirrel. Through an open door she would catch a glimpse of a baby—of the head of a Cherub—of a Lady at a Harpischord—and she was off. Michael Angelo himself could not detain her. It mattered nothing to her who had painted the picture if she did not like it; and very little if she did. She would settle on the picture itself as the squirrel stops and settles on the bough, crack the nut for a minute as if she had nothing else to do, and race away again.

Now Lucilla liked to take one room at a time, and to consult the Handbook. She wanted to be told, not only who every

painter was, but whether he had a wife and children, whether he lived in Venice, Florence, or Rome, whether he died a natural death or "disappeared." Two questions were, although she did not ask them in word, for ever present with her as she looked; the first, the eternal child's question, "*Was he good?*" the second, the eternal student's question, "*What did he mean?*" Having determined in her own mind that the early Italians were good (we know so little about them) and that they meant something (which is true occasionally), she went, by preference, to the Early Italians. She would stand for half an hour patiently making out the emblems of every bright particular star in Fra Angelico's Paradise, or in Botticelli's, quoting in a hushed voice remembered lines from Dante.

To her pictures were signs and symbols; if they failed to connect themselves with something invisible, she did not care about them.

To Kitty pictures were memories of some-

thing that she had seen for herself, and recognised with joy—suggestions of something it would be good to see some day.

To me pictures were pictures.

Both my companions displayed equal indifference to colour and drawing, and the only point on which they could agree concerned my supposed pedantry in such matters as these.

“That arm is all wrong,” I would say to Kitty, before an enchanting Sir Joshua.

“As if it matters about an arm!” she would reply indignantly. “It’s just the most darling little child I ever saw.”

“That leg is preposterous!” I would say to Lucilla, before a Blake.

“As if it mattered about legs!” *she* would reply indignantly. “He was thinking of souls.”

Yet Lucilla, in whom the quality of a teacher ran strong, although she never, to my knowledge, filled any educational post, was teachable, as teachers always are. With infinite pains I taught her to respect Velas-

quez' "Admiral." I induced her to lay out some of her spare time on "Bacchus and Ariadne."

She thought the Admiral voluptuous and cruel, and to this day I remain uncertain whether she really showed anything more than an amiable desire to meet me half way on that subject; but she did at last become an enthusiastic admirer of Titian—though even then I am afraid she found it easier in that "Bacchus and Ariadne" are an allegory, and Ruskin has an elaborate theory of the significance of it.

Kitty I never tried to teach: she taught me often by wise, instinctive flashes, as a child teaches.

"Let us go down these steps! Kitty ought to see the statue of Gordon," Lucilla said, after our first visit.

So we went down among the lions and the fountains.

If she had not spoken thus, I should have made an excuse and stayed behind, for I could not leave Trafalgar Square with-

out going to stand bare-headed before the greatest Englishman of our time. As we gazed at the statue no one spoke; and even Kitty stood still.

I think Lucilla, who had a purpose in everything she did, may have cherished the hope that the early Italians would open Kitty's eyes to the light invisible. If so, it was not fulfilled. We find what we bring with us, and Kitty being still a child, saw everywhere not Heaven but Fairyland.

It was much the same if we went on Sunday, as we sometimes did, to hear a famous preacher at the Abbey or at St. Paul's.

What pictures failed to accomplish, preachers might suggest perhaps, Lucilla thought. I knew instinctively the trend of her reflections; and I was further complimented by being asked to help in the second experiment. I was not a regular attendant at church myself. The ancient spell under which I had lived in my youth was broken, and I had lost the habit, but I fell into it again

gladly now there was some one who wished me to go.

“The child ought to hear the great preachers,” Lucilla said. “Would it be troubling you very much to find out who they are? I myself never stay for the sermon, if I can help it. When I was her age though, I felt differently. She ought to have the chance. Perhaps you would be so very kind as to take her some afternoon?”

Lucilla’s custom was to go to church early in the morning—I used to watch her leaving the house with her little prayer-book—and sometimes of an evening. She did not like a crowd, she hated emotion and excitement. An empty, quiet, unpopular church was the church of her choice, and wherever she went she made interest with the sexton to get a window open. It rather annoyed her to be considered “orthodox,” and she had little sympathy with those whom she called “dogmatic.” I vexed her once by the assertion that *orthodox* only meant *straight thinking* and *dogma* an *opinion*. They meant,

according to her, something much worse and quite different. Of course, if I did not understand, she said, she could not explain; people who knew Greek never did understand words. I am convinced that in her heart she thought *dogma* had something to with *dogs*, whom she disliked, not personally, but because cats disliked them, and cats were weaker than dogs.

What her heterodoxy consisted in I do not know, unless it lay in the fact that she believed that all men were made to be made good—and therefore happy—in the end. She did not tell me this in so many words; but I gathered it, partly from that unquenchable hopefulness which was, in her, the result not so much of nature as of thought—partly from the extreme indignation with which she visited the landlady when she found that Tricksy Wee had been terrified by descriptions of hell.

“If I could ever believe in it at all, I could believe that it was made for those who frighten little children!” she said, her

eyes gleaming so fiercely that I did not know them.

She was tolerant of different opinions in religion, so long as they were not cruel, though very clear as to her own.

Fanaticism alarmed her. I have seen her lips grow white when she encountered a detachment of the Salvation Army.

We were waiting on a doorstep to let them pass. I had turned to her with some commonplace remark, but it froze on my lips. I suppose I asked a question.

“It is,” she said, “that if that woman with the timbrel and the beautiful eyes knew the right word, and said it, I should be marching by her side to-morrow.”

I could not have believed these expressions if I had not heard them. They seemed to me wild—inconsistent—absurd. Yet, as I pondered over them in solitude, I began to feel that in religion also Lucilla might have to bridle and restrain enthusiasm that would otherwise have run to madness—I came to understand why it was that she

disliked excessive ritual, yet could not bear the absence of all ritual; that—dearly as she loved music—she preferred to accomplish the highest act of worship in silence.

There was one title the use of which never failed to provoke her quiet scorn.

“If people say *Our Lord* we all know what they mean,” she said. “If they say *Jesus Christ* we know what they mean. But *The Founder of Christianity*! It was left for the pedants of the twentieth century to find out that; they alone know what they mean by it.”

Kitty was quite as well pleased to go to church as she had been to visit Trafalgar Square.

She had the sweet, natural devoutness of all good girls, oddly combined with a dash of scepticism, inherited, perhaps, from her French father. She would ask difficult questions now and then as to the meaning of words, and Lucilla, for all her ignorance of Greek, did not know how to answer.

“Auntie,” she said one day, “I feel so happy on Sundays, when I’ve got on my new hat. Do you think it is quite true to say so very often that the burden of my sins is ‘intolerable’?”

“I hope that you will never live to think it more true than you do now, my child,” Lucilla said. She spoke as if she were pained, as indeed she always was if any remark were made as to the words of the Liturgy. Yet Lucilla had that morning put on her little close-fitting bonnet—the bonnet that became her so well—to go and say that the burden of her sins was “intolerable.”

Nor is there any doubt in my mind that she believed it was. Only when we are very young and logical do certain words appear to us to contradict certain facts in this way.

It was a foregone conclusion with me that the child would care most for St. Paul’s; but the fact that she did so baffled and disappointed Lucilla, who liked to go there that she might hear any one who happened to be with her say how much

more beautiful was the Abbey. To her the shadow, the mystery, the manifold associations of the dim shrine of St. Peter outweighed the beauty of the shafts of light struck through the dome, of the vast concourse of human beings kneeling and standing together as one man.

Wherever she might be, whether in the Abbey or at St. Paul's, Kitty sang and prayed with the best of them ; but I observed that she took an unobtrusive little red pocket-book with her, and that she employed the interval of the sermon in sketching. She seemed to find the study of minor canons more interesting than theology in a less concrete form—or perhaps it was the Cupid over the organ that she drew. While she sketched, Lucilla sat listening for morals and for reasons. If morals were drawn, if reasons were found for her, she remained content ; she had a fine disdain of mere rhetoric. *Is he good? What does he mean?* Again I recognized in her the everlasting child, the eternal student.

With music it was different. There the artist came in, and she boldly threw significance to the winds. Once or twice, when I ventured out of the condition of blind enjoyment to inquire what this, that, or the other *meant*, she looked at me as if I were making a fool of myself. She asked me once to go, when she and Kitty attended a concert, but I refused. I had heard them talking together. They said things not to be understood by any one except a member of the Royal College of Music. I preferred the concerts given in Back Street, where there were two soloists and an audience of one.

Sometimes they essayed a duet—to their own great satisfaction, but not to mine; for on these occasions the piano spoke with two voices, and I did not know what it said. In fact, they were doing what good manners would have prevented their doing in any other way—they were both talking at once; but they never found it out.

They were not even so good to look at as usual, for while the treble moved to and

fro, the bass sat fixed like a rock. Two sisters — twins, if possible — are the only people who ought to play duets on the piano. Difference of temperament is too strongly marked in all others.

Often Lucilla, who loved an opera, would play one through, recalling the story as she went along.

“We ought to take Kitty to see it,” she said one evening, when we were all three very happy over “Romeo and Juliet.”

“No, no,” said Kitty eagerly, glancing up from her seat on the fender-stool. “Don’t let us go. It’s much more nice as you play it, Auntie. It’s much more nice with only you and Mr. Raph here. I’ve been once, and I don’t like it. I don’t like the ugly, painted ladies. And I hate to see people making love to each other. I’d like to run away when I see that.”

“Kitty ought to go oftener to balls and parties. She ought to have more companions of her own age,” Lucilla said thoughtfully when she was gone. “I cannot tell what to

do about it. If I invite Frida they are very polite to each other, but one is always glad whenever the other leaves. They both want to talk to me, not to anyone else; and Kitty does not get on with Mrs. Hopgood, and won't accept Frida's invitations. She likes the masters at college well enough, but she does not seem to care for the boys and girls that she meets there; she will not let me ask them to come. I don't want her to lose touch with her own generation. It's not right."

"Were not you rather surprised just now?" I said. "I thought that all young ladies liked operas and plays, and people falling in love."

She sighed.

"They are so different nowadays. We were much more sentimental. Kitty often makes me feel ashamed of myself backwards."

"She is wonderfully attractive," I said, with a curious feeling that the room had grown darker the minute she left it.

"Yes," Lucilla said. "We shall not keep her much longer."

The words fell like stones on me.

“Surely,” I said, startled, “she is very young—too young to think of anything of that kind. You will not lose her yet.”

Lucilla sighed again.

“I do not know. She is nineteen. Older than—some girls.”

Lucilla finished that sentence wrongly. *Some girls* was not what she meant to say when she began.

What had she meant to say?

In a moment, without a moment's warning, I had come close to the edge of something that I should have liked to know. But I was stopped upon the edge; I went no further.

VII

MY cousin had asked many little services of me, seldom in vain. The time was come when I meant to ask something of my cousin. The conviction that she would be very much astonished, and not altogether gratified, made me laugh in my sleeve. Hitherto, whenever we enjoyed a friendly contest, I had always been defeated, but now I meant to win.

Time, that brings round many greater things, brought round the occasion that I desired. Frida was coming out, and a ball had to be given in Pont Street in honour of the event.

“I’m not going to ask *you*!” said my cousin. “You can’t dance.”

A fact, undoubtedly. Why should any one

dislike to have that taken for granted which is self-evident ?

I thought of the power of the human eye.

“No,” I said, fixing it upon my cousin with the firmness of a man determined to conquer or to perish. “You are not going to ask me, because I cannot dance, but you *are* going to ask some one instead of me, who can.”

“Oh, some man friend of yours ? Delighted !”

“No, not a man friend, but a girl.”

“A girl !” repeated my cousin, with disapproval as pronounced as if I had said “A porpoise !” “You, of all people ! And why, pray, should I ask a girl ?”

“Because she will enjoy it more than any one else you could ask.”

“It is not at all a question of her enjoying it,” said my cousin severely. “It is a question of my finding partners. If I invite her, will you promise to come yourself ? You can’t dance, of course, but at any rate you

can take her in to supper; and you look like a man."

I weighed the matter with a sigh, and said "Yes."

"Where does she live?" asked my practical cousin. "She has a mother, or an aunt, or something, I suppose?"

"Miss Z. is, at the present moment, her mother and her aunt.

"Oh, I see!" said my cousin. "*She* asked you to ask me, of course?"

"On the contrary, she knows nothing whatever about it."

"Oh, well, Frida insisted on her being asked, anyhow—the invitation's written—so it only makes one more. Here's a card. You'd better take it yourself, and then Miss Z. can give it to the girl."

"*Fancy Dress!*" I said in some alarm as I glanced at it. I had wished to please Kitty; yes; but had I wished to please her to the extent of appearing in fancy dress?

"I quite agree with you," said my cousin. "It's an awful nuisance. But somebody has

put it into Frida's head that she is like a Botticelli, and she wants to wear a dress that nobody could wear at any ball, except a fancy ball, and a cock's feather sticking straight up in the middle of her hair; so what was I to do? It's all very well for you, you're a man; you can borrow a uniform, or a pink coat. *You* needn't complain."

"I shall bring a bundle of parchments tied up with red tape, and appear as what I am—a solicitor," I observed. "It is rare for any one to appear in his own character; the most fanciful thing he can do, in fact."

After tea that evening, as she sat down to the piano, I asked Kitty if she were fond of dancing. In a minute half the fairies of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" were flitting over the keyboard. Presently she began to speak in a far-away voice, not like her own, playing louder between the words, and lightly when she wanted me to hear.

"So the Fairy Queen said there should be a dance in the forest. There were no birds, of

course, because it was dark. And they did not ask the Nightingale, for if he had come they would have listened instead of dancing."

Here the nightingale got into the piano and had it all his own way—but not for long. With Kitty, nothing ever was for long.

"But the bluebells rang, and the daffodils blew their trumpets. The moon was not shining, you know—they had forgotten to ask her—but all the stars were out; so they danced, they danced, and they danced till the jealous angry moon put her yellow face through, and shot an arrow at the Fairy Queen, so that she dropped down dead. Then they were all very sorry, and they had a Fairy Funeral, and this is the Funeral March. Auntie says you like Funeral Marches, Mr. Raph. Do you hear the rose-leaves blowing about over the grave?"

I did indeed. The room was filled with the tramp of tiny feet, and tiny tears were shed, and tiny wings folded. And with some other consciousness I was aware that Lucilla

feared lest Kitty were going where she should not, and wished to stop her, and knew not how.

“But the wind drove the clouds across the yellow jealous moon, and drove the rose-leaves off the Fairy Queen, and she woke up again, and they all danced for joy till the Cock cried ‘Cockadoodledoo.’”

With which performance of the cock Kitty concluded.

“There, Mr. Raph,” she said demurely. “Never ask me again if I am fond of dancing! I should like to dance every night of my life until I dropped.”

She rose from the piano, and took her usual seat on the fender-stool, with the sudden gravity of a kitten after it is tired of playing with a ball of worsted.

“Your fairies kept bad time, Kitty, and they danced in the oddest place I ever heard of,” said Lucilla. “Daffodils and bluebells and roses, all out together!”

“I can’t help it, Auntie. There are no clocks in Fairyland, and everything nice

happens there all at once. Do you—I mean, did you—like dancing, Auntie dear? ”

“ Yes,” Lucilla said. “ I liked it very much, but not in that way. This was how I liked it. Only *you* must dance now, or I cannot play.”

She moved to the piano.

Kitty sprang to her feet, caught up a Japanese fan that was lying on the table, lifted her white cotton skirt daintily with the other hand, and faced her own reflection in the mirror.

“ Play, Auntie, play! ” she cried impatiently. “ Play the lovely old Gluck Minuet that you played the other night! I know some of the steps. Father taught me.”

Lucilla sat down, obedient, to do as she was bid. For a second ere she began, she glanced at the child over her shoulder. The evening sun streamed full upon her, lighting up the words on the old mirror opposite, *Hier c'est demain*.

But I have only one pair of eyes ; when Lucilla goes to the piano, they belong to her ; so I know not what Kitty did. The

mirror knew, I suppose, for she danced to her own reflection. As the Minuet ended, she dismissed it, with a low curtsy and a wave of the Japanese fan.

“If you went to a Fancy Dress Ball,” I said, “what would you wear?”

“‘Little Turk or Japanee,

O, don’t you wish that you were me?’

Or would you be a fairy? Or would you be a lady with powdered hair?”

“What a hard question! It would take me at least a week to answer it properly. No, I would be the china shepherdess on Auntie’s cupboard, in a white dress, with lilac flowers and a lilac sash and a crook. Auntie should be a great tall beautiful Vandyck, all in black velvet, with a ruff round her neck. As for you, Mr. Raph, you should be that queer man over the mantelpiece of course—in the slouchy hat,—the man I used to think was Raphael. Oh why—why are we not all going to a Fancy Ball together? What fun it would be! I have never gone to a Fancy Ball in my life.”

“ Well, you are going to one now, my dear ! ” I said, with an odd sense of self reproach for not having seen to this most important matter before. “ So is your Aunt. So am I. But this will be the first Ball that I have ever attended. Will you take me as a *débutant* ? I am going in character, to the tune of a bundle of parchments tied up with red tape.”

I felt it necessary to be firm and clear about this, as I drew the card from my pocket.

Kitty snatched it from me, waltzed round the room with it, tossed it to Lucilla, who was still sitting with her hands on the keys, laughing softly.

“ Auntie ! ” she said, “ I always knew that Mr. Raph was the kindest person in all the great wide world.”

What is there in the midst of our mirth that checks us suddenly, in the sweet gratitude of the young ? Is it shame that when so little is needed to make them happy, we have taken so little trouble to give it

them? Is it the quick instinct that they will soon need more?

“How very kind of Mrs. Hopgood!” Lucilla said. “Of course I should never have thought of asking her. Frida begged me to go, the other day. She said I told her once that she was like a Botticelli. So she is, dear child—the thin, willowy figure, the pale delicate, sensitive face! She wanted me to see her dancing like Simonetta in Simonetta’s dress. I told her that I never went to dances since I had given up the pleasant habit of being young. But, now I should like to go; I should like to take Kitty.”

“Do you know, Auntie, that this is Mr. Raph’s first dance—the first he’s ever gone to in his life? We must start very early, so that he may not miss one moment of it. I’m going to give him a flower for his button-hole. What shall it be?”

“A bachelor’s button,” I said. “Will the Gentle Shepherdess and the Duchess by Vandyck do him the honour of dining with him at his club, before they go?”

“What fun! I did not know you had a club, Mr. Raph. When do you go to it?”

“My club is the South Kensington Museum,” I said. “I pay sixpence a week whenever I want to belong, and I meet the Gods of Greece there—and all the best company.”

If Kitty was not much like the china shepherdess on the cupboard, or any other shepherdess in or out of Arcadia, she was more like herself than I had seen her yet, on the night of the ball. I cannot in the least describe it. There are these radiant moments for boys and maidens when first the sense of power blossoms out, and on a sudden they become aware of homage in the eyes of those who behold them. Proud and delighted, Lucilla looked at me with triumph as who should say, “There! — But you doubted! *I* knew long ago.”

Kitty had sprung on to the sofa. Her little silver shoes sparkled and shone under her white and silver petticoats. She held

her silver crook, adorned with shining dewdrops, like a sceptre. A wreath of soft green leaves lay on her hair. Before her stood ranged her humble Court—Lucilla, stately in her sweeping robes of black—the charmed, obsequious landlord—the landlady, fussy and critical, but softened for once to true benevolence—Mahry in the seventh Heaven of frightened admiration—the middle-aged Solicitor, armed with parchments, who bent towards her, lifted her light hand to his lips, and placed in it a branch of lilac. She threw it over her shoulder like a sheaf.

“It’s just too beautiful!” she cried. “Oh, Mr. Raph!”

This also was like Kitty. She very rarely said anything so common as “*Thank-you.*” She expressed pleasure—which is a prettier thing than gratitude—by a cry, a gesture, a glance.

Thus, with all the good will in the world, amid the nods and becks, and wreathèd smiles of the inhabitants—the Old Lady peered at us under her blind, the children

stood staring in a barefaced group on their doorsteps, the Artist happened to be entering his door and paused, knocker in hand, and I caught the Florist's wife peeping behind her palm—we started for the club dinner.

As regarded the club dinner, there had been a slight difficulty a few days earlier.

“I think—if you do not mind,” Lucilla observed to me in private, “we will dine at the Museum first, and come home to get ready. Then we shall start fresh. If we were to go in our fine clothes, Kitty would only rumple her gown. She would be far too much excited to eat anything, and she would want to be off every minute. It will be much better to dine in peace and comfort. We shall have a long night before us. I know the child. You are not responsible. You may get home before dawn, but I am sure to see the sunrise. You remember how the Fairy Queen danced till the cock said ‘Cockadoodledoo!’”

In secret I was disappointed. I had looked forward to a white vision of the child among

the snowy fauns, the still Bacchantes of the Hall of Statues. Yet more I wished to see Lucilla, clothed like the Night, moving amongst them. I assented at once, however. Single people who rule their own lives are glad to be ruled for a minute or two, if they get the chance. But Kitty had been left out of the reckoning, and she disapproved with the utmost vehemence when her chaperone suggested to her that we should come home to dress.

“Auntie!” she said, “I am surprised at you. It was not you and me, it was a Duchess by Vandyck, and a china Shepherdess that Mr. Raph invited to dine with him. I couldn’t think of going as my own self. It wouldn’t be proper at all. I’ve not been asked. Nor have you.”

So it was a Duchess and a china Shepherdess who sat down with a Solicitor, parchment in hand, to eat beefsteak in the blue-tiled Grill Room, after all.

“What lovely cooks!” Kitty said, with a sigh of content. “I never saw such nice

cooks anywhere. They look like statue cooks in their white aprons."

She had regained her spirits after a brief eclipse in the Hall of Statues. In that faint, shadow-veiled light, in that world of frozen dancing girls and maidens gone a-hunting, a momentary silence fell upon her. She seemed to change like a chameleon, to take the same dumb huelessness. Lucilla walked along the solemn avenue as if she had a right to be there, as if she could at any moment, if she would, become a sister statue.

The cooks, turning and basting their beef-steaks at the fire, put fresh life into Kitty on an instant. She laughed and chattered until I felt sorry for a remote young art-student, dining in solitary state at the next table, clearly envious. I knew he would have liked to flirt with her.

Others came in—an odd, shady party, with bad clothes and good faces, and that strange touch of over-coquettishness in the girls, over-familiarity in the men, which marks those whom study in common is lifting,

but has not lifted quite high enough. To Kitty they seemed like people in a play. I am afraid she liked them all the more because they threw bits of bread at each other across the dishes. One was quieter, more refined than the rest—a Sir Joshua Reynolds of the future perhaps. He stared very hard at Kitty when he thought no one was looking; and once I caught him sketching her on the table-cloth.

To my amusement it was Lucilla, not Kitty, who betrayed excitement, nervousness, a certain fear of being late, a certain dread of being early—it was Lucilla who pretended to eat, and then asked me the time. Kitty did not hurry herself in the least.

Beefsteak, according to her, had never tasted so delicious; to see it grilled yourself before you ate it gave a kind of personal charm to the most national food in the world.

“Your health, Mr. Raph!” she cried, lifting her glass.

I returned thanks in a speech, to the great amusement of the art-students.

Vain man that I am, I was conscious of the many admiring glances shot in the direction of the Duchess and the china Shepherdess, for all that they sat cruelly muffled up in soft white clouds, as careless of mankind as if they had been true Olympians. I liked to think the students were wondering who the Solicitor was, and what he had to do with them.

Proserpina graced my speech, and Demeter. In the unspoken thoughts of the deep heart, I rather held that Lucilla resembled the Goddess of the Hearth, beautiful Hestia, who stayed at home and kept the fire bright while all the other Goddesses went out. I believe she would sooner have stayed at home that evening.

“Hush! Hush! You will turn the child’s head. It must be nearly time for us to go,” said Lucilla.

Not much of Kitty’s company did she and I enjoy after that; but, for my part, I did not want it.

As my two ladies fluttered and swept into

the drawingroom in front of me, I experienced something that I had never felt before, I saw that my cousin was impressed, that Kitty was not what she expected, that other people were impressed likewise.

Frida, the cock's feather in her hair, came up shyly, almost devoutly, to kiss and welcome her friendly Duchess; and they were quickly surrounded.

One fantastic, eager young gentleman after another, soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, appeared with great alacrity, murmured a word in Frida's ear, made Kitty a bow, seized the minute pencil hanging by a thread of blue to her card, inscribed his name.

"There seems to be no great difficulty about finding partners," I observed.

"I never thought there would be!" said Lucilla, with a smile in which lay something of the satisfaction of prophecy fulfilled.

As the evening wore on I forgot that, for the first few minutes, I had felt like a bat in sunshine. I passed through various stages of fresh experience.

There came first the unusual gratification of delicate, bright lights, of softly shaded roses, of rhythmical music, of flowers and feathers and flashing jewels, of graceful, curving movement. I watched, with sympathy quite new to me, each young figure as it entered—the hope, the wondering, the fear, the welcome, the aversion, the merriment, the dreamy surrender, on every face in turn—their formal stiff approaching of each other, their conventional greetings, the quick understanding or misunderstanding, followed by laughter or by embarrassed silence, the partners firmly held or fearfully, the rushing or gliding or measured steps together, the relief or the reluctance of the bow and the bended head, as the maid returned to the matron, and the young man sought another.

Sometimes I almost felt as if I could have danced myself. I learnt once, at my cousin's instigation, long ago, in the hour of my wealth, when she looked upon me as the eligible partner-for-life of a certain relative of hers. Not all her descriptions of this

young lady's charm, however, had persuaded me to cross the threshold of a ballroom in those days. I was far too shy. By what caprice of fancy was it that now I almost felt as if I could have danced myself? The thought brought back to me with a pang the recollection that I was middle-aged and lame, that I was here on sufferance only—the wraith of a man who, for the dancing world, had never lived—not the father, not the uncle even of any boy or girl in the room. That moment I felt alone, and bitterly alone, I wished that I were back in my dingy quarters in Back street. I kept a friend there always. Here he had left me.

“It makes one feel rather like a ghost, does it not?” Lucilla said. And from that moment I was no longer one by myself.

“Were you really fond of dancing?” I asked.

“Yes—and no. I was very fond of it in my girlish days, when I learnt from an old

French dancing master with a fiddle, who used to say, 'Now, my dears, there are rats in that wall, and they will bite you if you lean against it!' He taught us pretty, sliding, curtseying steps and ways—not to look glum, not to frown at each other—not to go squarely through a crowd, but like a smiling human wedge—not to "waddle or toddle or walk in two parishes at once," (that was the way most Englishwomen walked, he said) not to bang doors behind us, always to smile and to look gracious. When I came out into society and found it so different—found that people gave themselves no time to be gracious, and me no time to practise my careful steps—I was disgusted. I always liked the minuet, the long slow polonaise, much better than waltzing. I should have danced in the days of Louis XIV., I think.

"I am very glad you did not."

"I could always keep step with one person—and that was Kitty's father. Because he was French, I suppose."

To have danced with her—to have made her like to dance with him—not to have married her! What manner of man could Kitty's father be? French I supposed! French like the dancing master, to whom, according to her own account, Lucilla owed her graciousness of manner.

“Kitty inherits that. She dances well, does she not? She makes her partners respect her. That thickset Guardsman over there, who tumbled down a few minutes ago, did quite well so long as she had him in hand. Do you see the Nabob standing by the conservatory? He is a famous cricketer. I sometimes think he is inclined to pay attention to Frida.”

“He seems to be paying considerable attention to Kitty,” I observed. “He never takes his eyes off her.”

“Oh, that's only because he doesn't want people to see he is looking at Frida!” Lucilla said with comfortable assurance.

At that moment Kitty was whirled past us, and I marked the curious distinction,

the air of dainty fastidiousness, that made her other than the others.

All this time Lucilla had been absorbed in her. She had only one interest in the room, and that was Kitty. Everything else was only Kitty's background. She had spoken of the ghost feeling because she wanted to answer something that I had not said; not because she had any time to feel like a ghost. She had not wandered away to herself, to the rooms where she dwelt alone. It was because I had done this, that all this youth made me feel old, cold, solitary. It was because she had not done this, that she seemed to me younger, farther away from me again.

Rows of what is, I suppose, the usual kind of mother, were seated along the wall. No doubt, because I have not much acquaintance with them, they seemed to me all very much alike, and very much like my cousin.

I wondered how women felt when first they introduced a daughter into society;

whether they were most pleased or frightened, as the murmur of admiration went round ; whether they were relieved if she danced just as everyone else danced, and that was all ; whether they recollected their own girlhood and sighed or smiled.

Lucilla appeared to have gone through most of these phases.

At first, she confessed, she was lost in the study of Kitty's dress.

This amazed me ; surely there was no room for uneasiness on that score.

"You are quite wrong," Lucilla answered seriously. "I had forgotten the wall-paper."

"Dear me," I said with a glance at it. "If you had recollected, would you have dressed Kitty in pomegranates?"

"I might, or I might not. Dress is much more a matter of relation than people think. That is the vexatious thing about a dance of this kind, you never can tell what other people are going to wear. I could have dressed Kitty even more becomingly if I had known beforehand who her partners

would be. It does not matter later on ; but a girl ought not to be too original, she should harmonize with her surroundings. However, one must leave something to chance, and to her own taste.—Charles I.'s costume goes best with her, as to colour, I think ? ”

Charles I. was the young man with bad agate eyes whom I had met before at my cousin's. I resented his assumption of the character, I could not feel certain that, if he were beheaded, anyone would be able to write of him :—

“He nothing common did, nor mean,
Upon that memorable scene.”

He seemed to me to be doing common things every minute.

It was altogether disheartening to see how few people understood the parts for which they might, with fitness, have been cast, in other ages, or in the golden East. The Nabob for instance, was a fair-haired, blue-eyed Saxon as any you would wish to see. A

good blowsy, frowsy dumpling of a girl, who might have made a passable Audrey, appeared as Joan of Arc, at sight of which profanation it was all I could do not to use bad language. But Charles I. was very foolish indeed. He made despicable jokes about his silly head, and I saw Kitty laughing at them too, which annoyed me.

“I cannot think why he was introduced to Kitty,” I said. “I don’t like him.”

“I do not think there is any harm in him,” said Lucilla. “He was not born in the purple, of course. That sort of person always does want to be Charles I. Now Kitty has some right to call herself a china Shepherdess, has she not?—Frida looks very picturesque.”

I thought myself that Frida looked very odd; but I contented myself with remarking that she showed great devotion to Botticelli. *Picturesque* is a favourite word of Lucilla’s when she wishes, but does not venture to say that a girl of whom she is fond “looks pretty.” I might have said what I liked,

however, for, having satisfied herself as to Kitty's dress, she had begun to give even closer attention to Kitty's partners, and they succeeded each other so rapidly that there was no keeping count.

"I like to watch her ways," she said, with a smile. "They amuse me. Such a child as she is—and yet she understands the game!"

I wondered whether Lucilla had understood it so well in days gone by. I thought not.

Presently her face clouded a little.

"She has danced too often with Charles I.—three times in succession. She will get herself talked about."

"She danced three times with the Nabob about twenty-four hours ago, if that is any comfort to you," I observed.

"You must be feeling very tired," Lucilla said, with sudden penitence. "Why will you not go home? I cannot bear to take her away just when she is enjoying herself so much," she added, apologetically.

A wave of the dance carried the child up to us.

She paused an instant to give her fan to Lucilla.

“Oh, Mr. Raph! don’t go! Not yet,” she cried.

Of course I stayed. I never meant to go. It amused me to watch Charles I. and the Nabob hating each other more and more. But Kitty was prudent as she was bold; she danced a fourth time with neither.

The sparrows were chirping when we drove away, and I saw the dawn as I had not seen it for many long years. It showed me that Lucilla looked more weary than I had ever seen her look before.

“It was a lovely evening. How I wish we were just going to start now!” Kitty said, unbuttoning her long glove regretfully. She looked as fresh as if she had spent the last six hours in rosy slumber, instead of in the arms of a dozen breathless young gentlemen, tearing round and round a hot, stuffy room with a slippery floor.

“Are you tired, Mr. Raph? It was good of you to stay all the time. I couldn’t have

had the heart to keep Auntie, if you had not taken care of her. Oh, Auntie dear, you are tired ! ”

“ Not at all ! ” said Lucilla, bravely opening eyes that had closed already. “ So you were happy, dear ? ”

“ *Happy* is no word for it ! ” said Kitty. “ I never was so happy in all my life. ”

Lucilla smiled at me.

It is a satisfaction to a man getting on in years to think that he has had any hand in helping a girl to be happier than ever she was in all her life ; and I recollected the words with pleasure whenever I was not falling heavily asleep in my employer’s office, the whole of the next day.

VIII

I HAPPENED to be standing in the hall on the night after the dance when I heard a summoning, distressful cry from Kitty on the landing above.

As fast as my lame leg would let me, I hobbled upstairs.

“Is she ill?”

“No, but Auntie is so unhappy. Oh, Mr. Raph, do, *do* come in and comfort her! Persica is lost, and we can't find her, and Auntie is just as miserable as she can be.”

Lucilla turned a mournful face towards me.

“Yes,” she said trying to smile, “it is quite true. The poor thing is lost, and it is my fault. She was here after luncheon. She wanted to lie beside me on the sofa,

and her hair is coming off, and I said, 'No, Persica, I can't do with you to-day.' It was very unkind when the creature was losing her fur. The door stood open, she walked straight out of the room, and now we can't find her anywhere."

Lucilla's voice "quivered ominously" as they say in English novels. I, as they say in French novels, experienced "a dumb rage." Such a fuss about silly old Katerfelto! I might have lost every hair on my head, I might have stayed out night after night, and no one would have cared about me. Did she expect me to go to the Cats' Home, to look for him?

"I hope she is dead," said Lucilla. "I should be much happier if I knew she were dead."

"I am quite sure she is dead!" I said, with determined cheerfulness.

Whereupon Lucilla turned away, not to let me see her—well, I did *not* see them! and Kitty behaved as if I had slain her precious pet with my own hands.

“How can you, Mr. Raph?” she said indignantly. “Don’t believe him for a moment, Auntie dear. She will come back, I know she will.”

“Perfectly certain to come back to-morrow morning,” I chimed in, seeing that Kitty had the key of the situation, and it was best to follow her lead.

“Auntie has been tramping round all the streets in the neighbourhood, and ever so far along Brompton Road and towards Eaton Square,” Kitty exclaimed, with a strong touch of drama, “and now she wants to go out again, right down to Chelsea, to take some brandy to a poor old woman who’s not well! I don’t know what to do with her. I would go myself, only she will not let me, because it’s dark. Oh, Mr. Raph, do tell her not to go! She’s much too tired, after last night.”

Lucilla had on her little close bonnet, and her mantle was hanging over the arm of a chair. She was looking weary and worn, and most unfit for a night expedition.

“You must not think of it,” I said, surprised into decision by Kitty’s absolutely misplaced confidence in the power of “a man” to decide. “I’ll take the brandy myself. Where does the horrid old woman live?”

Kitty shot arrows of reproach at me out of her gray eyes.

Lucilla was almost herself again in a moment.

“I could not let you go,” she said, with the utmost seriousness, “if you spoke about her like that.”

“Very well then!” I said, in desperation. “Where is that angel of an ancient lady? To what Heaven am I to turn my steps?”

Kitty, her folded arms along the head of the sofa, her head resting on them with an inscrutable air like that of a young and amiable Sphinx, nodded sagaciously.

“How very odd of you,” she said. “Because, you know, the old woman really does live in Paradise! Paradise Row—No. 7—on the ground floor.”

“I really cannot let you——” began Lucilla.

“Infirm of purpose, give me the bottle!” I said, again assuming the decision in which Kitty had the innocence to believe.

Smiling approval, she went to the cupboard at once.

Lucilla must have been very tired, for she yielded without more ado.

“You may as well take these too, Mr. Raph,” went on Kitty, pulling a bunch of forget-me-nots out of the china vase in which they were blooming. “Auntie will only have to go back to-morrow, if you don’t. She always takes a flower.”

“Oh, very well,” I said. “What else?”

I did not expect the answer that I received.

“Would you—would you mind reading her a chapter out of the Bible?” Lucilla said.

I was fairly staggered. I had never read a chapter of the Bible to anyone. All that occurred to me at the moment was to say,

“Which?”

“Isaiah Sixty,” Lucilla instantly rejoined.

I put the brandy bottle in my pocket—accepted the forget-me-nots, thoughtfully tied up by Kitty with a piece of silk which gave way the moment I reached the landing—and was preparing in the lowest spirits to depart, when Lucilla seemed to think that some explanation was necessary.

“I go to her on Wednesday nights because she is too lame to attend a Service at Chapel that she used to like. And she can’t see to read to herself. She has a Bible—a Bible in large print, and she will be expecting——”

“Oh, very well,” I said, “I can only trust that the magnitude of the transformation of the reader will not give her too great a shock; I never have killed anyone before, I daresay I shall to-night. But we must hope that, come what may, she will appreciate my first appearance as a District Visitor.”

“She’s not a district,” said Kitty pleadingly, “she’s only a very nice old woman, a Mrs. Trump, who used to work for Auntie before she grew too blind.”

“I have no doubt she is charming,” I said; “I daresay I shall be passionately in love with her by the time I return.”

For some reason or other, the notion of this appealed to Kitty’s sense of the ridiculous, and she began to laugh, and laughed so wildly that at last Lucilla was obliged to laugh too. I never felt less like laughing in my life.

“Oh, Mr. Raph,” she cried. “You *must* come and tell us about it when you have seen her. Must he not, Auntie?”

Lucilla smiled, but she assented.

A vague idea of hiring Mahry for half a crown to go instead flitted through my mind as I made my way down the stairs. But it was dark. Lucilla would not have dreamed of letting Mahry do what she would not let Kitty do; I knew that well enough. She had a code of her own about servants, and she told me once that she considered herself just as much bound to look after Mahry as if she had been her niece. As for the angelic old woman, she would evidently, in

the opinion of all concerned, quit Paradise Row for Paradise, unless she got her brandy that very night. No, there was nothing for it but to go myself!

However, it was as Carlyle said of the only play that he was ever induced to witness, "not so bad as I expected."

Shyness is, I have sometimes thought, a form of conceit, and shy people are apt to exaggerate beforehand the unpleasant effect of their presence upon somebody else. Except on certain rare occasions, we all make less effect than we think we shall. Mrs. Trump had, it was clear, seen odder things than a small, shy, lame, middle-aged gentleman armed with a brandy bottle and a bunch of forget-me-nots—undergone experiences more strange than the sudden substitution of him as her chaplain in the place of a tall and gracious lady. I took to her at once. She was round and round-about, had good, kind, straight blue eyes, wore an expression like a bowl of bread-and-milk, sweetened with sugar.

“The ladies is very good to me,” she said, as I produced the medicine bottle. “My duty to Miss Z., sir, please, and tell her it’ll do me well till she comes by again. I’m not a heavy hand on the drink.”

There was little air in the room, because it was so very full of texts and china ornaments, but the lamp gave cheerful light, and showed a fern making a gallant struggle for existence in the window, and a bowl of glass wherein two gold fish swam round and round and round till I felt giddy.

Mrs. Trump explained to me that they only cost a penny a piece, that they ate nothing but ants’ eggs, which are not, it appears, an expensive luxury, and that she had the glass bowl for ninepence “off of a friend.” She seemed to fear lest I should think she had been extravagant in the matter of gold fish. Of course I did associate them chiefly with the gardens of palaces and with passages about a porphyry vase in “The Princess.” All the more did I rejoice to see them adorn the unpalatial apartment of Mrs.

Trump. As beheld from above, they were about the size of minnows; but the glass had a magical property, and if you looked at them from the side they were miniature whales. I do not think my cousin studies the ways of her Persian cat as Mrs. Trump studied those of gold fish. I learned much about the fern also—about the ways of ferns in general when they live in London. I have seen a fine conservatory full of them, that gave me less to think upon.

“I like a bit o’ green,” Mrs. Trump said. She could not walk further than the end of the street, but she seemed to possess the Park and Kensington Gardens in that one flower-pot.

The interview passed off agreeably on both sides, and when I left, I was surprised to find that I had lingered in Paradise Row for nearly three-quarters of an hour.

If my walk thither had not been altogether an easy one, my walk thence was the best walk that I had taken for many a year. Not to my own dark, dingy room was I

returning. I was going where I should find a welcome, where people would be pleased, amused to hear of my doings. How I liked passing my own threshold and the darkness within!

Kitty sprang to open the door as soon as she heard my step. Her cheeks were flushed because she had been kneeling by the fire, she was armed with a toasting fork, and a delicious smell of coffee filled the room. Lucilla, who was resting on the sofa, looked as if she were comforted, and smiled.

“You’ve been a very long while,” said Kitty, with a martial flourish of the toasting fork, as though she were prepared to run me through if I contradicted her. “We were wondering and wondering when you would come. You must have ever so many stories to tell us. No, not now! Eat first and talk afterwards! Here is Auntie’s coffee—here is a cup for you, nasty black stuff, that’s what you like! and this is a piece of toast I made on purpose, just because I was tired of waiting!”

Kitty was in her element that night, Lucilla being too weary to interfere. She made much more stir about the little details than ever Lucilla did; but it was all as if she were playing a very important game; there was no room for any one to say a word till she had done.

“Would you mind holding a skein of silk for me while you are talking, Mr. Raph?” she said.

I was become a strangely useful member of society. Kitty was the kind of woman who always did something herself and caused everybody else to do something also. As I sat there, my hands caught in that silken chain, I thought how pleasant women made the night—the night that in my dingy room downstairs meant nothing but study or sleep.

“What’s the silk going to turn into?” I enquired.

“Embroidery, of course!” she rejoined, holding up a ridiculously small volume of “Selections from Browning,” ridiculously bound in white. “I’ve got a lovely piece

of green serge. I'm going to work the 'C Major of life' in the middle."

"How absurd!" I said. "A book that is not a book at all, only a number of bits torn out, bound in white to begin with, and in green to go on with, when the very title shows that it never ought to be bound in anything except brown!"

"I don't care. I don't care in the least. I'm very glad it's white, not ugly brown, and I shall keep it clean and white as long as ever I can—all my life!"

"We have heard nothing yet about Mrs. Trump. Did you see the King and Queen in biscuit, on the mantelpiece?" asked Lucilla.

"Oh yes—and 'Little Samuel,' and 'The Huguenot,' and 'The Highlander' in the green kilt leaning against the pink china rock?" said Kitty.

We had not known that there was so much to see in Paradise Row until we came to talk about it. We had all seen different things, it appeared.

Another hour glided away before we came to the end of the discussion.

“What a delicious evening it has been!” observed Kitty, with a touch of regret, as she gave me her hand to say good-night. “Dances are awfully jolly, but after all, I would rather spend a quiet time like this, Auntie, with you and Mr. Raph.”

“You would not think of going to a ball to-morrow if somebody asked you, oh, not you, would you now?” Lucilla said.

“You’re very naughty indeed, Auntie. You have no business to ask questions like that! I shall go straight away back to my own house, this minute. Give me my cloak, please, Mr. Raph.”

I put it round her shoulders; but even then she had so many last words to say to Lucilla,—whom she would see again the next morning,—that I went down before her.

As I opened the door of my own room, something darted past me up the staircase.

It was Katerfelto, who had been hiding under my table all the while. Then, indeed,

was there such jubilation upon the Drawing-room floor that, once more summoned by Kitty, I was fain to repair thither. Mahry, grinning from ear to ear, brought back a jug of milk, Lucilla poured it into the Japanese bowl, Kitty sat on the floor and laughed.

“Well,” I said, “I should think that cat will run away again! If it had saved the life of another cat, you could not make more fuss about it. Poor beast, how you are ruining its character! Not a chance for it to rise in the scale of being!”

The pleasantest evenings, however, must come to an end some time. The good-nights were said all over again, Kitty had gone home, the lights were out, the house had sunk into silence, and still I sat, below the statue of Gordon, reading the prophet Isaiah. Lucilla had not asked me any question about that part of my visit to Paradise Row. Even if I had seen her alone, I could not have told her. There was no need to do so, for I am sure she knew. The bitterness there had

been in my heart about the poor—about the difference between one class and another—melted away as I read.

“For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron : I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness.”

IX

AN inexplicable shade of difference stole over our lives after that ball. Kitty was just the same, but Lucilla and I came to treat her as if she were more grown up. I do not think she noticed it, however.

The examinations were about to take place at the College of Music, and she went there oftener for lessons and worked rather more when at home. Nothing of that kind lay heavy on her soul; she was not in the least nervous. Her calmness of spirit amazed Lucilla, who was always more anxious for her than she was for herself. She never took the highest honours, perhaps because she did not seriously try for them; but she passed well and, so to speak, with a little feather in her cap, whenever she had the good luck to

meet among the examiners any one who cared more for style than for technique.

As a consequence of the ball, the Nabob and Charles I., who had been on calling terms before with Lucilla, began to call very often, so often indeed that I used to ask Lucilla which of them intended to stay permanently.

She only laughed.

“Kitty amuses herself,” said she, “but her heart is quite untouched. It is not, by a long way, the first flirtation of either of those young gentlemen. I have had broken hearts to mend before now. It will do no harm on either side. Besides, she is soon going home; that will put a stop to the whole thing.”

“You will miss her,” I said, with sudden fear—a sudden hope on top of it, that she might need the gentleman downstairs a little more.

The reply was different from that for which I looked.

“No,” she said bravely, “I shall not miss her: I have always told myself that it would not be for long. I have been saying that to

myself ever since she came. And by and by, when she is married, I will love her child."

But Lucilla's eyes glistened; and I believed her eyes rather than her lips. There was pain in my heart for her, and—stronger than the pain—the hope that she might need me more.

I cannot remember how it came to pass—the very vividness of certain moments annihilates those which precede them—but on a night of later July we were sitting, all three, by the piano, and an unwonted silence had fallen among us. Lucilla had but to listen as a rule—to listen as she always listened—and Kitty's tongue ran on; but that night she listened in vain. I thought perhaps the child might have some girlish confidence to make, and rose to go.

"No, Mr. Raph," said Kitty. "You are not going yet. You never go so soon as this. Auntie, we won't let him go!"

And I stayed, because, following the example of Lucilla, I always did what Kitty wanted.

“She is so sensible,” Lucilla used to say.

As for being sensible, she was neither more nor less sensible than other people of her age, she was entirely capricious, but Lucilla liked to think she was sensible—liked to believe, I think, that she had made her so. Or else, being accustomed to command, it amused her for once to obey.

But although Lucilla asked me to stay—and though I meant to stay before she asked me and stayed accordingly—and though there were as many things in the world to talk about as ever, that uncomfortable silence fell again, and fell heavily.

Now Kitty in the part of the Silent Woman was Kitty in a part with which I was not familiar, and I did not know what to do with her. It was not the happy silence that Lucilla and I enjoyed so often. Girls under twenty are ignorant of that. When they are silent it is because they are shy or sad, or because they cannot find words—not because they have passed into a region where there is no need of them.

“How lovely the stars are to-night!”
Lucilla said.

I have noticed that people will talk about the stars when they have nothing else to say. Strange presumption of human nature, to drag those vast worlds in, that we may escape a momentary embarrassment! If we saw things as they are, we should be afraid to speak of the stars. With Lucilla, however far afield she might roam, something practical was sure to follow. I waited, and it did.

“Let us draw our chairs up to the window! It seems a pity to shut them out.”

She signed to me to lift the sash higher, and the cool soft evening air crept into the little room and lightened the tension. A curious chequer-work of light and shadow, thrown from her own lamp and from somebody else's in another house, diversified the blank wall opposite. A bar of black roof stretched in a straight line above. Straight black lines of chimneys shot up from it. At right angles went a row of dusky houses,

with windows like dim, veiled eyes, here and there faintly shining. An infant moon curled, feather-like, behind the chimneys. The stars shone thick and bright.

All at once Kitty began to speak.

"I wonder if there are people up there. Do you think there are, Mr. Raph?"

"Have you been reading 'The Story of the Heavens?' I asked. It was a favourite book of Lucilla's.

"No. I can't read. What's the use of it? I never take in anything unless it's what I've thought before. Then I write *Glorious* all down the page. Then I think, 'How silly! when it's only my own thought stuck into words that I couldn't find.'"

"Have you thought all the thoughts that are in all the books, dear?"

"O Auntie, I didn't mean to be conceited! I only meant that, if I haven't thought the thought, it's no use reading the words; I can't understand."

"When you are older you will think differently. Books give me my thoughts."

“What is being older?” said Kitty, wrinkling her forehead. “It seems to me so funny to put people’s ages on their tombstones. How can it possibly be true? One person has lived ever so long in five minutes. Another has never been alive at all for fifty years. Browning says, when we’re happy there’s nothing except *Now*. That’s true, of course; I had to write *Glorious* all down the margin just before I came in to you.

“It is not true,” Lucilla said. “There was always *Yesterday*; there will always be *To-morrow*.”

“Not if you’re living, Auntie—not if you’re really alive, alive all the time. And if you’ve once been alive—really alive every bit of you—alive in some one else—it can’t matter when they die, or when you do. It’s all the same. It’s not the house they live in that you care about. Why should you mind?”

“We *must* mind, dear!” Lucilla said, very tenderly, but as if she were alarmed. The subject went too near her heart for discussion, I could see that; and yet I had no wish to let

it drop. Something in Kitty's earnest way of speech appealed to me. She seemed to be my own youth speaking, although, at her age, I could not have spoken. Just in that way I used to feel about the insignificance of death. The deceiver that we call Experience had taken away my early trust, but when I heard her speak I knew she came nearer the truth. Besides, the power of death cannot be felt till it is known, and though the young think of it more often than we do, words cannot give them any idea of this. No, let their blessed ignorance remain ! There is more faith in it than lies within the compass of our knowledge.

I tried a strain of thought which I knew that Lucilla would not follow.

“ If we could remember that Time is an illusion—that it is only our way of thinking things, one after the other——”

“ Yes ”—Kitty caught me up eagerly—
“ then it wouldn't matter, would it, if one went away, and the other were left—if one died and the other were left ? ”

“It would always matter,” Lucilla said in grave, distressed tones. “There’s only one sorrow that can be worse.”

“I think I’ve got no heart, Auntie. It’s fast asleep in me. To-night I shall lie awake and think of all the dreadful things I’ve said to you and Mr. Raph. I don’t know what to do now for thinking of them. I don’t know why I’ve talked like this. I never do it to anybody else. It’s something in the way you listen. Oh, I am very sorry! I know I am not old enough to talk. You and Mr. Raph never said a word—you only helped me along. O, will you both forget it, please? Will you promise me not to remember? Will you let it all go, the minute I’ve shut the door?”

Her words came hurrying out, vehement, eager, as if she had let some terrible secret fly, and were trying to catch it again.

I would have comforted her if I could, but my phrases were clumsy, they did not meet the winged need of the moment. Lucilla said nothing; she drew the girl down on to

her knee as if she had been a little child, and held her fast.

The clock of a neighbouring church struck in, and reminded Kitty that, whatever her theories of eternity might happen to be, it was now, by mortal time, ten o'clock.

“ Oh dear, I ought to go ! ” she cried. “ I feel as if I can't—as if this talking would cling about the room when I'm gone. Why did I talk ? ” She rose to throw her cloak round her, protesting all the time. She turned to me, took both my hands in hers, looked in my face with something in her gray eyes that I had never seen there before—then flung her arms round Lucilla's neck, rested a moment against her, and went.

Lucilla followed.

The sweet voices were gone ; there was no sound but the light rasping of a withered leaf against the rough brick wall. I was left alone in that room where I was never alone. Memory rose in her strength and took possession. She blinded and deafened me so that I did not heed Lucilla's return nor observe anything until I heard her sigh.

“What is the matter?” I said, awaking with an effort.

“I wish Kitty would not talk like that of things she knows nothing about.”

“She is very humble, really.”

“Do you think that? I am glad. I felt so much afraid that you should think her vain.”

“No,” I said. “You were right.”

“What do you mean?”

It was her turn to look startled now.

“Do not you see what lay behind all that talk?” I said. “She cares for someone. She is trying to face the thought of what it would be to her if he died. That’s why she felt as if she had told a secret—as if she could not forgive herself.”

Lucilla thought for several minutes.

“Yes,” she said at last, with a dawning smile. “Yes. Perhaps it may be so. I believe you are right.”

There was no pretext for staying any longer. I wished her good-night. I suppose she wished me the same; but notwithstanding, I spent a bad one.

X

WHEN I came home from a business visit to the Record next day, I was met by the information that Miss Kitty had left that morning. It did not surprise me. No doubt she wanted to consult her own people.

There was a dismal sense of flatness about the house.

Mahry was going about with red eyes, she had evidently wept for several hours. I heard the landlady's shrill voice scolding away in the kitchen. The landlord looked more wistful, more resigned than before. Miss Kitty's box had come unlocked at the last minute, he explained, and no power on earth would induce it to lock. They had called him in next door, but he could do nothing. He seemed to imply that I could have done some-

thing if I had had the sense to be present. "Young ladies didn't know what they was going to encounter." In his opinion, it was tempting Providence to start with a box that would not lock.

After dinner, as I was sitting listlessly enough in the dusk, thinking how twenty-four hours may make another evening "Long ago," there was a tap at my door, and Lucilla entered.

She took my breath away.

It was the first time she ever came to my room—and the last. How I should have prepared for her, if I had known she was coming! But things are best as they are. At any rate I am not much of a smoker, and if there was no scent of flowers, there was no smell of tobacco. The kindly twilight would not let her see how different my room looked from her own.

I have honoured her coming since she went away, if I did not honour it before. In the chair that she occupied no one has sat since; though I dust nothing else, I dust that.

I could feel rather than see that she looked radiant. She held a telegram in her hand.

“News!” she said, a little breathlessly. “I was obliged to come and share it with you. You were right, Kitty is engaged.”

“Which is it? Not Charles I., I hope? The Nabob would be better than that.”

“Neither of them! An organist—a good serious young man—almost handsome. He has just passed out of College with the highest honours. He gave her the little white Browning that I admired so much. Don’t you remember how she scolded you when you said Browning ought to be bound in brown?”

I did not choose to recollect.

“Has he anything else to give her?”

“O yes! He has been offered a very good post in Australia. They will have quite enough to live upon.”

“A long way off,” I said. “Why are you so much pleased?”

“Because she is happy,” Lucilla said; and paused as if she had mentioned something sacred.

“I could not tell you before,” she went on. “She only spoke to me this morning, just before the train started. She thought she ought to tell her mother first. I was not to say anything to you until I got the telegram to say she was with her mother. It came ten minutes ago.—She will make the dearest little wife, will she not?”

“Just like anybody else’s,” I said. “An enormous family of course, marrying so young—eleven or twelve children.”

“That would not be in the least like Kitty,” said Lucilla, very much hurt.

“Oh well,” I said, “I daresay she will be more tiresome still about one or two.”

Lucilla rose.

“I am sorry that I came,” she said; “I did not know that you—that you were busy. I thought you really loved her. She sent you such a sweet message of goodbye. She wanted you to want her to be happy.”

“I wish her every happiness,” I said. “But she will never be so happy again as she was with you.”

It vexed me that Lucilla should make such a tremendous point of some one else's getting married, when she was not married herself.

It vexed me that I should have appeared to her in my own hard, true colours.

I spent another bad night.

The next day I pretended that I had never behaved like that. And Lucilla pretended that I had not either. There are some occasions in life, when, between friends, this is the only way to ask—and to receive—forgiveness.

Everything turned out just as I knew it would.

A few months later, the giver of Browning endowed Kitty with all his worldly goods—there were not many of them,—and she went out with him to his new post in Australia.

Lucilla did not attend the wedding.

“I cannot trust myself,” she said.

I knew then that she thought Australia a very long way off.

I was asked too, as a matter of form, but I could not feel sorry that the state of my

finances made it impossible for me to accept the kind invitation.

In the long winter evenings that followed, Lucilla would often read aloud merry letters from the other side of the world. We laughed together as we made out, from Kitty's rough plans and sketches, where every bit of furniture stood in her tiny drawing-room, where every picture hung.

"It must be like a doll's house," Lucilla said, and smiled when she came to a passage describing how Kitty hung the Portrait of the Unknown, which I had given her at her own request, over the fireplace, to remind her of Mr. Raph.

One little letter came to my address, to thank me for the picture—but I did not keep nor did I answer it. There would be always a message for me, and I would send a message back. But she was gone out of my life.

For a short time I felt grievously the loss of the brightness, of the youth of the house. Then I became reconciled to such a point that I did not even desire her return.

Kitty had shown me what being young meant.

My own youth, after the first, had been rather like other people's old age. The accident that lamed me for life ruined my health for a time. I had spent many winters abroad, in frugal pensions, among maiden ladies and yet more maidenly widows, until I felt like a widow or an old maid myself. When I came back to England well and strong, no one believed it. My cousin shut every window as soon as I entered her drawing-room and was careful never, unless of course she really "wanted a man," to ask me out to dinner, "Because, poor fellow, he cannot stand the night air." It was the absence of the night air that I could not stand; I was careful not to enlighten her.

But, if Kitty had shown me what being young was like, she had also made me feel older than ever I felt before. She clearly thought Lucilla so very old; and if Lucilla were very old, I shrewdly suspected that I must be older still. For people like Lucilla—

and like me—she knew, of course, that life was over. She took it for granted that I had lived—once upon a time—but I, who only once, for a moment had known what she called *life*, was silently cast down by the thought that she knew I could never live now. She turned the key in the lock for me as I had not yet turned it for myself.

When she was gone we resumed our former pleasant and peaceful ways. One habit Lucilla had not lost while Kitty was with us. She always continued to play for me on Sundays. I had gone rather more often of an evening too: she said it amused Kitty, and now she did not discourage my attendance. I had no feeling whatever that she needed me; but I was not in her way.

Still, that which had come and passed so quickly, did not leave us as it had found us. We were not quieter after Kitty went, we had been just as quiet before—but we were more conscious of tranquillity. There was not the flutter of wings that I had always heard about the room when she was there—

the sense of the strange unrest—the ever-varying charm of Spring.

If I had turned octogenarian, Lucilla seemed younger for the change, I thought. While Kitty was there she had taken her proper position as the experienced Aunt-like friend, the one who *knew* where youth was only guessing. It amused me to hear her wise, proverbial sayings when all the time I was aware, in secret, that the heart in her bosom beat with sympathy as keen and as unreasonable as that of the girl who sat perched on the arm of her chair. I never tried to be proverbial. Kitty shared her own youth with me in her joy; but speaking as she did on that last night, under the stars, she threw me back on old forgotten feelings, with such force that I shivered and hid my eyes. When we say, *It is good to be young*, we forget that at the same time it is terrible. I shook the recollection off as soon as I could, but ever after I felt the older for it.

XI

“**W**HAT a comfort it is, to be middle-aged ! ” Lucilla said, one day. “ Some of the pleasure of being young is gone, not the happiness—and there is more freedom.”

“ I cannot imagine that you were ever in bondage to public opinion,” I said, smiling. “ Have you not always done just what you liked ? ”

“ I suppose I have, more or less,” she answered, as if she were amused. “ But when I was young, I did what I liked, and it worried the aunt with whom I lived—she disliked it very much. Sometimes she worried me. And sometimes I liked things that were mere vanity. It seemed as if coloured veils hung between me and the true

things that I wanted. Now I know what they are. One is happier really, reckoning it all up together—don't you think so?"

"I am happier than I have ever been," I said, as we say the truest things of all, without any intention to do so.

Lucilla made no response. She did not ask me why.

She was gazing into the fire. As I sat and looked at her, I thought again what happiness it was to see her, to be near her, to hear her voice. Othello's words came flashing to my mind:

"If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

Not that I had the slightest wish to die. I should have liked to go on living as we were living then, always.

Never without something of a shock, even now, do I recollect the minute that followed—the minute in which it first crossed my

mind that Lucilla was hiding something from me. Had any one asked the question, I should have been puzzled to say what it was that she ever confided. I was wont to enter her thoughts as she entered mine, without any knocking at the door in set sentences. Suddenly—plainly—mysteriously—the door was shut. We were sitting by the fire together, just as we had sat many a week before; but in a moment she went her way, and I was left.

My way led, earlier than usual, down to my own room, where I sat and pondered.

Was she displeased?

Was she unhappy?

Was she—hateful thought!—thinking of some one else? For some want of reason or other, I could not get this last supposition out of my head. Such a strong sensation of hatred started up in me that it seemed ridiculous to have no object for the feeling. It must be a third, a shadowy third that had come between. Whatever, whoever it might be, he was hateful.

Why had I not stayed on, and affronted the question boldly?

What are you thinking of? Is there anything easier to say than those words? Why had not I said them? She was frank and candid as a child. Evasion, subterfuge, were things unknown to her. If she did not desire to speak upon a given subject, she told me so, and there was an end. It would have been easy to ask at once; and now it was impossible.

Perhaps I dreaded the answer. But would not any answer she could give be preferable to those which I was inventing for her?

What was it that had happened? What was it that, in a moment, divided her from me?

Could I have been mistaken? Was it some absurd fancy of mine?

I tried to think so, but I could not. Certain impressions of the mind are tangible as outward facts. If a wall had erected itself between me and my heart's friend, I could not have been more firmly convinced.

Well! Two days more, and Thursday would come round. I must learn something then.

Meantime I found an extraordinary interest in work. I went to see my cousin. I studied the questions of the day. I read books. It was all curiously stale, flat, and unprofitable. At every turn I thought of something that I wanted to say to Lucilla, of something that I wanted to hear her say. Politics were the only comfort. She was not a newspaper woman. *The Spectator* once a week more than satisfied her. Over the intricacies of a Bill I could sometimes forget her; she was tangled up with everything else.

On Wednesday night, however, Mahry brought me a note from the Lady on the Drawingroom floor. Lucilla begged to inform the gentleman downstairs that she was compelled to go out on Thursday.

Compelled! Who or what was compelling her?

I began to wish that I were very ill. If anything were ill, I had never known Lucilla

deny herself the pleasure of taking care of it. If I were ill, she would hear from the landlady, and I knew, I felt sure, that she would come. But we are ill when we are ill—not when we should like to be ill.

Somebody else was ill perhaps. Who could it be?

Was it of this that she was thinking when the barriers rose up and remained?

If she chose to have another person there, some being whom I could not see, some creature whom she preferred to her visible guest, she might have him all to herself, I was resolved to share with none. I would not go again. Next time she asked me, I would refuse.

Thursday week, however, was a long way off. Was there nothing to be done in the meantime? I supposed she would play as usual on Sunday evening; it did not occur to me that she could fail there!

I composed a satirical appeal for a piece of music on a theme that I had never suggested before, *Souvent femme varie*, and I requested

Mahry to take it up on Sunday evening; but she gave me no chance. For the first time in our long tenantry of the house in Back Street together, when I asked Mahry to take up the little note as usual, I was met by the announcement, "Miss Z. is out."

I am ashamed to say how late I sat up, waiting to hear Miss Z. let herself in.

I reproached myself. Perhaps I had let her see, when I left so early, that I felt annoyed. She had gone out, on purpose, to avoid playing. It was very good of her to play for me every Sunday; perhaps she was tired of it. Yet had I been no ungrateful listener. I had enjoyed this music far too much to think about the kindness. I imagined—was I wrong?—that she enjoyed it also. I had experienced little of the pleasure of intimate sympathy in my single life, and now I grew alarmed. What if it went? What if *I* had killed it? All the kindness in the world could not take the place of that. With every turn of the clock I grew more wretched.

Some deadly accident of course had hap-

pened—a judgment on me, because I had not valued this treasure while it was mine.

She had fallen from a 'bus.

She was imprisoned in the depths of an underground tunnel.

She was lying, desperately wounded, in some Hospital where nobody knew who she was.

London became the den of horrors that it really is. How did she dare to walk alone in it? How could I ever have let her go?

It fretted me past bearing, that neither the landlord, nor the landlady, nor Mahry, betrayed any anxiety whatsoever.

Called up and questioned as to whether she had left word that she should be away for the night, Mahry stared and said,

“Naow, sir!”

Called up and questioned, after Mahry had presumably gone to bed, as to the state of the weather, the landlord opined that the streets were like glass and there would be several people would have broke their legs in to-morrer morning's “Dyly Myle”; but when I

said that ladies ought not to be out on such a night, he only remarked that Miss Z. went out in all weathers, and she was a real lady, she was, and it never seemed to do her no harm.

As for the landlady, I heard her going callously upstairs just as usual, after she had turned out the gas in the hall and left a candle and a box of matches on the bracket.

At length, just as I was preparing to start on a tour of inspection of St. George's, the Brompton Consumptive, the Workhouse Infirmary, &c., &c., I heard the key turn in the lock and knew Lucilla had come in. She came in just as if it were twelve o'clock in the middle of the day instead of midnight. I detected neither haste nor delay in the sound of her footsteps. I retired to bed in a state of virtuous indignation with her for being heartlessly unaware that she had caused me to spend hours of torment. She ought to have known—she, who always did know.

Next morning I thought again, very seriously, of the engagement that was to engage

me that evening—or on Thursday—or whenever she condescended to ask me upstairs again. Certainly she deserved that. There was plenty of time before me. I need not invent it yet. The afternoon would do.

No note came down, however. I had never gone on Monday without a note. Of course I did not go.

Well, Wednesday would do for that invention!

And yet, when Wednesday came, my one dread was, lest Mahry should bring me another note; for on Thursday—it was the old arrangement—I went without one.

Wednesday came.

Wednesday passed.

The Ides of March were over. I forgot all about the engagement that was to engage me on the day following. I went to bed happier than I had been for a fortnight, and rose with a delicious sense of lightness.

A fortnight? It was a hundred years since I had seen her!

When I hobbled upstairs to the drawing-

room floor at the accustomed hour, I felt like a schoolboy coming home for the holidays. I felt as if I had neither eaten nor drunk for several weeks. Yet was there a beating fear of difference, a shrinking in me lest that which had been so long, so happily, the same, should have changed. Better for me, if this were so, not to have left my dingy room again!

I had not crossed the threshold before all these fears vanished.

Katerfelto lay, fat and round, before the fire, and purred a little when I scratched his ear.

The parrot let down a skinny membrane half over his eye, which was his horrid way of winking, and said, as if he were making a confidential communication:

“How are you?”

Betsinda rose from her three-legged stool and made a curtsy—she had learned how from Kitty and was rather proud of it; and I made Betsinda a bow. She brought me my cup and saucer very carefully without

spilling a drop, and was rewarded with a piece of cake, which she ate with the utmost decorum.

“Now, Betty,” Lucilla said, “you may make us another curtsey and run away.”

Betsinda vanished, regretfully but without demur, Mahry removed the tea-things, Katerfelto walked out of the room after her, the parrot went to sleep on his perch, and Lucilla and I were alone once more.

“Lucilla!” I said at once, not giving myself time to reflect, “what were you thinking of, this day fortnight?”

“I was thinking of some one whom I shall never see again,” she answered quietly.

A feeling like remorse checked any answer that I might have made. I had been jealous of him. Poor fellow! and he was dead.

“It is wrong to forget,” she said, after a pause. “If we are not true to those whom we cannot see, we are not true to those whom we can.”

“He is—he is often with you?” I asked.

“He was always with me until this time

last year," she replied, no tremor in her voice, but a seriousness of conviction as if she had made some statement against herself.

"You would never forget any one. You are constant by nature."

She shook her head sadly.

"I thought so once; but it is not like that. I did forget. When we talked about being happy the other night, something you said showed me that it was not like that."

I began to wish that she would forget again. After all, what was the use of remembering? It did the poor fellow himself no good, and it made me uncomfortable.

"If," I said sturdily, "if I were dead, I should not care to be remembered—much. Not if remembering had to be kept up, you know."

Lucilla's eyes flashed for a minute, but she said nothing.

I was concerned to defend her against herself. I really thought she was behaving with a singular lack of good sense.

"What is the use of pretending that you

care more than you do ? ” I said. “ It is not even sincere.”

She changed the subject with a dignity that made me feel as much ashamed of myself as if I had broken all the Ten Commandments at once.

We talked on ; but on my side, at any rate, there was a difference. It was better than not seeing Lucilla at all. How “like a winter ” had her absence been ! And I did not feel constrained to leave abruptly, as on the last occasion. Yet it was not so good as it had been before. Still the visionary third came between.

He had astonished me into surprise at myself as well as at Lucilla : and I was almost as much annoyed with him for the one cause as for the other.

After I had returned to my own apartment, I sat a long time, pondering over his antecedents.

A charming person, no doubt—otherwise Lucilla would not have cared for him.

Handsome of course, and all that. “ A

leg," like Sir Willoughby Patterne, a "balustrade leg!" Mine, I felt conscious, though I had never thought of it before, must distress Lucilla. She did not let me see; that was only part of her kindness.

He must have had a fine manner also—not *gauche* and awkward.

I wondered if he had ever sat alone with her. As I wondered, I hated him furiously; and, in a minute, all my anger turned to commiseration.

Poor fellow! He was dead.

It was this that had surprised me in the first instance. I am not wont to pity the dead. I never pitied one of them in all my life before. What! Pity those who are, beyond all power to think it, *free*? Not I!

The only men among the dead whom I dared to pity were those who died without having lived; and even those I pitied less than when they moved upon this lovely earth, not seeing it. Perhaps I was wrong there. Who shall say? I had known lives that were to me so piteous, that I was afraid to

waste my pity on those who were—I could not but think it—better off.

Dying is bad, of course.

For myself I looked forward to dying—to the mere act of transition—sometimes with a sudden cold anguish of horror and surprise—at other times with such a high-wrought curiosity of interest that it was rapture—sometimes with complete indifference. If I die in a moment—or in my sleep—it can be no great matter. I have rehearsed it in a faint. The common lot involves greater suffering than that, and death, in whatever form it may draw near, is “violent death.” I have often thought it strange that people should bestow more compassion on a murdered man than on one who has lain a-dying for years. Outwardly, man appears to be more merciful about this work, no torture that he invents can equal the pain of slow disease. But death, when it comes, causes the dead to forget even the terror of their dying. However they may have suffered, the look upon the face of the dead is the seal of the solution of all tragedy in divine peace.

“ *Poor Oliver !* ”

I used to think how my cousin, who will certainly live to be ninety, bar accidents, would say this over me, and would perhaps feel really very sorry as she did so. I should be far away, beyond her pity, no longer lame, no longer bound by all the chains of Illusion. I thought of it with deep humility, with trust in that Forgiveness which is Love, with hope. I thought also that I should see my friend again.

I did not care for funerals. Therein I incurred the reproach of my cousin.

“ Every one should wish to pay the last tribute of respect, she said.

Funerals gave a neat finish to friendship in her opinion ; but for me friendship did not end there.

I needed no other company than that of one dead man. Long ago I had smiled when my cousin said to me in a sympathetic voice, “ You must feel so lonely in the evenings, Oliver ! ” Often I had refused to leave my room because, to leave it meant leaving him.

As I recalled these things, I seemed to creep into a strange sense of emptiness. I found that it was long since he had come to me. Had I also begun to forget?

The dead are jealous; they will not come when there is any thought of others. Of late, as I sat in my rich solitude, I had thought of Lucilla.

My old fears of her returned upon me in full force. What was this that she had done to me? She had taken away the dead.

Not content with that, she had brought her own—a dead man whom I had never seen, to haunt me perpetually.

Why had she thought of him always “until this time last year?” It was eighteen months now since Kitty had left us. Why, this last year, had she ceased to remember?

This began to be worse than anything else. After all, the dead man was not my rival, but my fellow. She must have given him up for some one living.

With lightning swiftness the conviction struck me down, that this explained her

absence. She had gone out to meet the living man, whoever he might be. Why did he not come to her? Much as I should dislike his coming, it would be better than to know that she went to him. Perhaps he did come, though I knew it not. There were long hours of almost every day when I was out.

Yet, if this were her strange way of telling me, I did not know what she had told.

She had let me see that she was displeased with herself. It might be, after all, that she did not care—that the dead man was the stronger of the two.

Was this really so? Or did she only deceive herself?

She deceived herself, that was clear. She might forget for a moment—not for a year; and only now had she remembered her forgetfulness.

If I pitied even the enviable dead man because he was not alive to be loved by Lucilla, what were my feelings towards his successor?

There is considerable doubt as to what they should have been—and none at all as to what they were. I considered him very presumptuous.

What business had he to trouble a mind that had long ago ceased to be ruffled by the storms of youth? If he made her go to him, he was not showing her due respect. If he did not take the trouble to come himself, how could he be in earnest? I would have given the world to know whether he did come. I was frantic at the thought that Mahry must know perfectly well what it was life or death for me to know—and I could not. I went the length of proposing to myself to sit at home a whole day and watch. Fool! I might hear the hall door open, but could I rush out into the passage, or peep through the keyhole? Any one who would might come and go, and I be never the wiser. Besides, hot shame overtook me when I found that I was turning spy. Again, again, what had Lucilla done to me?

It was not Lucilla, it was the man. Did

she then care for him, seeing she had forgotten the dead on his account? My sympathies were with the dead.

I began to feel a kind of friendship for that dead man. She had never neglected me for him as she did for the other. Now she had forgotten him, forgotten me. I also was numbered among the dead.

She had reposed great confidence in me when she spoke of him. In a few words the secret of much lay hidden.

It was for his sake that she lived unmarried in Back Street—that she who, whatever she might say about it, loved children, had no child of her own. It was perhaps for his sake that she had been kind to me—a lonely fellow with no one to care about him. But there I drew up. I hated that she should be kind to me for anybody's sake except my own. I could not but think that, after all, she was my friend—my own.

Well—what was my course to be henceforward?

If she cared for this other—had cared for

him a year—she would marry him, I supposed. It was only natural to suppose that, once she was married, she would leave the house.

Leave the house!

I am ashamed of the turn that my reflections took at this point. Life, as people older than Kitty know, is made up of little things; that is the only excuse—and it is worse than none at all.

A nightmare vision of the house, as it had been before Lucilla came, rose up before me.

Mahry, I felt sure, would go with her. There would be another Mahry, like the first, her matted hair down her back, her shoes down at heel. The landlady would cook just as she used to cook.

There would be no Thursdays in the week, no Sundays—no music, not a note.

In the bitterness of my heart I wished that Lucilla had never come. Before she came I had not missed the harmony she brought, except with a vague sense of something absent. Now it was not a question of missing, but of definite and most serious loss.

My feeling towards the dead man grew more friendly than ever. He had been a good neighbour. So long as he remained alone with Lucilla, I was happy.

I must know whether she was going to be faithful to him.

I could not ask.

Clearly she was not. She had been unfaithful for the last year. She would not have told me this now, if she had not meant me to understand that she was going to give him up—with regret it might be—with self-reproach—for some one dearer.

Well! Had she not a right to do so? I had been on her side against herself. I had told her that fidelity to something remembered that you did not, of your own accord remember, was rubbish. People think that they can deceive the dead very easily. He could not speak for himself, and I had spoken for him. My sympathies were with the dead.

XII

ON the Sunday following I asked Lucilla to play—not mentioning that this time it would be *in memory of a friend*—the movement following on Chopin's Funeral March—the Dead Leaf movement—where the dead boughs are whirled about the grave.

She might well consecrate as much remembrance as that to the memory of her own friend, I reflected. I wondered whether he had been a soldier, and fallen, like him I loved, in battle. Yes, that was it! That must be it. That was why, from the first, she had understood.

Again I caught myself thinking rather of her friend than of mine.

She played the March, however, and not

the Dead Leaf movement. She played in the old, beautiful way, as if she were pouring out her heart, as she had seldom played while Kitty was with her—and not, I think, since Kitty left. There again, music is language, but it has no words; nor could I tell what was being spoken. Was it unutterable fidelity? or only unutterable regret that all things pass? She was making confidences, she was crying out from the depths of her soul, but I did not know what she said.

I was in a miserable ecstasy while it lasted. Afterwards the ecstasy went; and I was miserable and nothing else.

Why?

There was no reason at all.

I recollected fits of this absurd, aimless, disproportioned wretchedness, in the days of youth. In my freedom from that condition I had rejoiced for many years. Here I was, no better than twenty-five again!

I took myself to task finely, the next morning. It was all nonsense. It interfered

with work, and with friendship. It was ridiculous of me to go on making myself unhappy because Lucilla was not unhappy enough about someone who had died—Heaven knew how many years ago—someone I had never seen!

Let me put away idle sentiment and every thought of the rivals, living and dead, who were contending for Lucilla's affection! Let them fight it out as they would! They were nothing to me. Let me make the most of what the gods had given! Let me "keep my pittance clear from poison of repining!" My part was to rejoice in her friendship so long as it remained—to help her if I could, if I dared, to be true to herself! Once before I had failed her at need, I had not entered into her unselfish happiness as she had trusted that I should. I would not fail her now in her distress.

From some undefined but very strong feeling I took her no flowers when Thursday came.

Did she notice? Was she too busy with another thought?

Other people often sent her flowers, but on that day my heart smote me when I saw that there were none. Her new friend, whoever he might be, was neglectful of his privileges.

“Why did you ask me to play that Chopin on Sunday?” she said, when we had finished tea. “I found it hard. You never gave me the name of any hero.”

“Why should you always play it for a hero of mine?” I said. “Have you none of your own?”

“I have known very few soldiers in my life. The men whom I have known were mostly business men or scholars.”

Here was the heroic death of the first admirer disposed of at a blow! I felt oddly disappointed. Had he died as other men die? That was not right.

“Every hero is not a soldier,” I said; but without conviction, for in my heart I rather thought he was. It was because

I thought he was a soldier that I had tolerated the idea of the man at all.

“O dear no!” she rejoined, with more alacrity than was desirable. “I have wondered sometimes why it was, that you gave only the names of soldiers.”

“Would you have liked to play for a Bishop?”

I began to be afraid that her new friend was a heroic clergyman in the East End. That was why he sent her no flowers; he was too poor—he had conscientious scruples about spending a penny. She had gone to the East End to hear him preach—and that was why she came in so late the other night.

But her smile, at the thought of playing Chopin for a Bishop, dispelled my fears.

“No,” she said. “I would play for a Missionary Bishop—they are heroes sometimes, from what I hear. Or I would have played for Westcott. You have only to look at his face to see that he was a hero. Not for any other Bishops. I believe I

have more heroes than you. But you have not told me why it is that you always give your hero the name of a soldier."

"Because I knew one."

She sat silent in the old, understanding way.

"It was a great thing for a lame dog like me," I said.

"The greatest—for anyone," she answered, low and reverently.

"Nothing else matters. In the end it is more real than anything."

"I wish I were sure of that," she said, the poignant note of self-reproach in her voice again. "One feels unworthy—unworthy afterwards, to have known. It is as if things went wrong that never need have gone wrong, if one had thought beforehand. I cannot understand it at all. I cannot understand myself."

I was in the awkward position of a man who hears a secret without in the least comprehending it. When women talk about *one*, they drive their auditors to distraction.

Lucilla—clear as light—Lucilla, who never got into difficulties because she always knew what she wanted—now spoke in riddles; she might, in fact, as well have played the piano so far as any definite impression, except that of sadness, was conveyed by her speech. Two people, who, as a rule, are independent of words, are in a bad way indeed when words become a necessity; they have got out of the habit of asking questions. I asked myself questions without end:

What had she done?

Why did she feel unworthy?

Why were things wrong that never need have gone wrong if one had known?

They were questions that I could not or would not ask her.

Yet I felt rather happy, happier than I had felt for some time. I had steeled myself to look upon her happiness. On the contrary, she was wretched; and she had told me so. I had always rebelled against the maxim of La Rochefoucauld, that there is something not displeasing to us in the

misfortunes of our best friends ; now, with an inward shiver at my own selfishness, I found it was true. I liked better that she should be miserable and tell me so, than that she should be happy and keep the reason to herself. What was become of all my fine resolutions ?

I sat silent, hoping that she would speak further.

“ We never ought to despise people, ought we ? ”

Here at last the next move was an easy one.

“ Most certainly ! ” I replied. “ Despise anybody who does not think as you do. It is the only weapon you have against him. He is not worth anger, and clearly he is not worth sorrow.”

I was feeling, with scorn and self-contempt at the moment, how differently Lucilla would have acted, had I confided to her that *I* was troubled in mind.

“ I mean,” Lucilla said, humbly but not much as if she had been attending, “ there

is a friend—no, not a friend—an acquaintance of mine, who lost her husband. She married again—and on her wedding day she laid a wreath on the grave of her first husband. I used to laugh at that.”

Good heavens ! Had Lucilla been married before ?

“And now you wish to do the same ?” I inquired.

She laughed outright this time, and I was reassured in a moment. No widow ever laughed like that.

“I ought not to be amused,” she said, as soon as she could speak. “If I had married, I dare say I should have done just the same.”

“Perhaps you would. You remember the words of the French diviner, ‘*Il ne faut jamais dire, Fontaine, je ne boirai jamais de ton eau*’ ?”

“I do not *think* I am faithless,” she said, with a touch of something like defiance.

“I warn you that I do not care whether you are or not,” I replied, catching something of her tone. “You recollect how Kitty said

that *Now* was everything? ” More and more I felt as if I could not trust myself to use my own words. “It is. But—” here I spoke out because I could not help it—“I think you have some faith. I think you will not quite forget even so late a friend as I am, when the time comes for you to go away.”

A look of utter amazement crossed her features.

“To go away? ” she repeated.

“You are going, are you not? ”

I stopped breathing until I had her answer.

“Yes.”

It seemed as hard as if I had never expected it, never made up my mind to it, never known that it must be so. I felt as if she had taken a pistol, and fired it point blank into my breast.

“How did you know? I have not told any one.”

“You forget that I hear your thoughts.”

“Not thoughts like that!” she said, as if bewildered. “They don’t go deep enough.”

It was foolish of me to have held my

breath. Now, for some reason or other, I could not let it loose again. It only came in long gasps. I was gaping in an odd way. Everything in the room was first extremely clear and then invisible. Everything out of it was first acutely noisy, and then it turned into a sound like the waves of the sea. I stood up, meaning to move towards the door. But I had not gone one step when my conscious life ceased altogether.

It came back with a stinging taste of *sal volatile*—a sense of shame at having fainted in somebody else's room—a powerful disinclination to get up and see whose room it was.

“Lie still!” said Lucilla.

Oh yes, I would! I would lie still there for the rest of life, if I could look at her. It was not lying still that was difficult. Outside were the storms and the strangers.

She smiled, held up her finger when I tried to speak, laid it on her lips, took a book from the table, and seated herself at the end of the sofa, where I could see her well.

It was very pleasant to lie and look at her.

She had drawn a screen between me and the light so that it might not hurt my eyes. There was something restful in the fact that I saw only the grand outline of her figure, and not the details of her face. She seemed to be busy with that book, for she never once raised her eyes from it. But I did not want to talk, nor even to think, although my mind was clear.

I was weak. Now that I come to think about it, I believe that I had not eaten much that day. I had been rather busier than usual, and had not recollected. Every 'bus was full when I started for home, and being too impatient to wait, I had taken the unusual course of walking.

There came over me the gentle ecstasy of a mystic after a long fast, I had reached the end of all effort; there was nothing left for which to fight or to struggle. I lay still, as she bade me, and looked at her.

I remembered a great many incidents of which I had not thought for years, and I

remembered them in the right succession. Underneath it all ran the current that runs when we are dreaming—know that we are dreaming—are resolved not to awake. If I could only lie still there, could only go on dreaming, Lucilla would not drive me away. She would let me lie still there till I had done. So I began to exist over again.

In some strange manner, without the slightest exertion of memory,—I cannot explain it—my past life seemed to have risen to the same level as the present—to be, as the objects are in a Japanese picture, on the same plane. It was as if I lived through all that was gone by once more, yet without losing consciousness of the actual moment, of Lucilla, seated there with her book.

I cannot omit what happened, for it seemed as much a part of the continuity of life as if it had never happened before ; but I must fail to give the true impression, because I am compelled by the terms of language to relate it in the past tense. Really it all went on in the same room, at the same time.

XIII

LUCILLA'S room was yet Lucilla's room, and still I was a lame man lying on a sofa ; she sat beside me still—I felt the comfort of her presence—and yet I was again a little child.

It began with the sound of a voice singing
“Bonny Dundee.”

I knew this by some inner sense more subtle than that of hearing—knew that it was my nurse who sang as she moved about, airing the linen before the nursery fire. How merrily it danced upon the bare, familiar walls ! Down below in the street the lamps were lighting.

“To the Lords of Convention ’twas Claver’s who spoke,
‘Ere the King’s crown shall fall there are crowns to be
broke,
So let each Cavalier who loves honour and me,
Come follow the bonnet of Bonny Dundee!’”

Into my nursery they rode, these jolly riders, out at the window, and I after them. I felt so very happy, so very safe! How I galloped down "the sanctified bends of the Bow" and over the Causeway! How I "spurred to the foot of the proud Castle rock!"

I was holding my breath when——

"The Gordon demands of him which way he goes—
'Where'er shall direct me the shade of Montrose!'"

On we went, on we went, flouting the Whig, racing over "the hills beyond Pentland and lands beyond Forth," rousing "the wild Duniewassals three thousand times three!" We were about to "couch with the fox," when there was an end of all this.

A footstep on the stairs.

The singing left off suddenly.

The scene shifts.

This time Lucilla's room is the dining-room at the bottom of the tall house in Bayswater—a room to which I rarely go, because, unless I am sitting under the table, I do not feel safe there; and I never feel

happy. It is Friday afternoon, however, and on Fridays I am tempted down to see the man who—as my nurse says—“has the time,” and puts it into the great big clock in the corner. (I used to wish that he would take out some of the afternoon time, which was long and dull, and put in more of the evening, for that was short and full of romance and ended up too soon with bed.) We call him, between ourselves, Man Friday, for “Robinson Crusoe” is one of the few books in the nursery, and I like to play at being Robinson Crusoe. Man Friday is a kind, sociable, friendly fellow. He is laughing and showing me how the clock works when again that footstep is heard outside the door. He stops laughing at once, he does not even finish what he is telling me, but slinks away as if he had done something wrong.

Again the scene shifts.

This time it is the library that rises within Lucilla's walls.

Into that room I never go, for there my father sits. But on that day I thought that he was out. The door was standing open, and I ventured in, lured by the bookshelves. Up in the nursery there were no books at all except the Bible, and "Robinson Crusoe," and "The Pilgrim's Progress." Here there were rows upon rows of books from floor to ceiling, books of all sizes and colours. I took out one, the nearest and the gayest, bound in scarlet, and opened straight on the stag-like eyes of my beloved Dundee, on the account of his death at Killiecrankie, slain by the silver bullet. Safe in my happiness, I had begun to read when I heard the footstep outside. I put the book back on the shelf, and slunk out of the room like Man Friday.

It was like that always.

Wherever my father came, there also came fear and silence. Wherever he came I shrank away from him.

I was not fond of that solid square house,

even as a child ; but then I was indifferent—its dreariness did not afflict me as in later years, and there were certain portions of it, certain oases in the desert that seemed to me to be inhabitable. One was the floor under the diningroom table—one the triangular space behind the grand piano in the drawingroom. From these coigns of vantage I would peep out upon my father. The rest belonged to him ; but these, like the nursery which he did not enter, belonged indisputably to me ; they were my home.

There was always, even in these dim days, a consciousness that I wanted some one.

When I was taken out to walk in the Square, when I heard the cries, the shrieks of laughter of the other children, as they raced and romped together, I thought it was another child that I wanted. I used to give them names of my own as I watched them shyly, longing that they would ask me to play with them.

They never did.

Sometimes, if they were not there (but

they were almost always there) I could be very happy by myself. I remember making a nest of dried leaves once, and sitting in the midst of it, persuaded that I was a bird. But I could not play at that kind of thing if they were there. The shouts, the laughter, gave me the feeling of an exile upon a desert island.

Often, of course, I played at Desert Islands. It is a very good game when you are all alone.

But still I wanted some one, I always wanted some one.

So, like a long, slow dream—not happy, not unhappy—childhood went by.

As time passed on, a tutor was engaged for me, a good and conscientious man, who taught me a great deal more than he was paid to teach.

I did not like him at first. I was very backward, never having learnt the lessons that other children learn as a matter of course. I was slow, as children are who

live alone. I was not good at games. Outwardly submissive, I rebelled in my heart against the drudgery alike of school work and of the solemn cricket, that my tutor wisely compelled me to play with him in the Square. It filled me with an inarticulate sense of outrage, to find that books—my one delight—were now a burden; to have to waste precious hours (I had not known before how precious freedom was) adding up the bills, or measuring the walks, the drain-pipes, the wall-papers, of utterly uninteresting, impersonal people called A, B, and C. Claverhouse and the Jacobites had not accustomed me to that kind of thing.

Furthermore, my kind nurse was sent away. I was not told that she was going, until, in a burst of tears, she revealed the dreadful secret on the morning of her departure. I rushed downstairs to the library. Weeping, I besought my father that she might stay. He told me not to be a baby. She left the house that afternoon.

When she was gone, however, I attached

myself to my tutor. The first and the worst hours were over, and I began to like Latin and Greek, and, indeed, every other lesson that was not arithmetic.

I owe it to him that I gained admission to the library. He promised my father that I would not hurt the books.

Hitherto, ever since my unlucky intrusion, they had been forbidden fruit. I was not allowed to touch them. This prohibition added to—perhaps I should rather say it created—the interest that I felt. My eager eyes were familiar with half their titles long before my fingers grasped them. What wealth it seemed after those years of envious gazing through the half-open door !

Except for the moment during which I held “Dundee” in my hands, I do not think they had been touched since my grandfather’s time ; it was he who collected them, for he was a great lover of books.

He was my mother’s father, and it seemed to me that, if he had been there, he would have liked me and I should have cared for

him. I used to sit devouring those old books of his, what time my own father wrote his letters or studied the papers, with the curious concentration of the practical mind upon financial issues.

The backs were variously bound, according to the subject. To this day I always think of Theology in inky black—of Geography and books of travel in brown, the colour of the Earth—of History in purple like the robe of an Emperor—of Shakespeare and Milton (there were no other poets) in the hue of an evergreen. In all that great drab house there was only one patch of red—the shelf that held the Lives of Soldiers.

These last awoke in me passionate admiration of the British Army. It was a grand collection of Memoirs; the old business man must have made it his chief recreation to read about the high-handed deeds of the Redcoats. Here and there a faint line of pencil in the margin attested his love of them. When I saw this line—when I felt my heart stirred as his had been at the

sound of a trumpet, I met him—I knew, for all the intervening walls of space and time, that he was nearer to me than the figure in the armchair at the writing-table, adding and adding empty cyphers that stood for nothing but little bits of gold.

These books did much to save me from the oppression of the house that was their prison as it was mine. The library was the only room that seemed to be alive. As I sat there and read, I recovered something of the old sense of freedom, of property of my own, that I had enjoyed when I lived under the piano or between the legs of the dining-room table. Yet even here the many-coloured bindings were so solid that I felt sometimes as though I could not get at the contents for the cover. Among a hundred, no handwriting adorned the fly-leaf of any one book. There was a plate, stuck correctly right in the middle of the first leaf of each, a dagger, and the words *Once and for all*. Not one had been a gift; they were bought and paid for. Except

the faint pencil line, no token existed of any human sympathy. These books of peril and adventure opened a new life for me, showed me there was a world elsewhere. They made of my existence a different matter—but in one way they made it worse.

The impersonal heaviness and stiffness of the place weighed on my spirits as if it were the perpetual assertion of a thing that I knew *not* to be true. The cliff-like mantelpieces of dull, impenetrable marble—the tables, immovable as rock—the ponderous chairs that mocked each fugitive desire to change the look of even so much as a single corner of one of the symmetrical square gloomy rooms—these bits of wood and stone had no humanity, and they de-humanized those whose business it was to dust and polish them. The servants were stony persons that “knew their place.” At stated times and seasons they appeared—did their work—vanished again. In between they were neither seen nor heard. For all their

fear they had a certain esteem of my father, who possessed an irritable temper and would fly out at them on occasion in a manner to make anyone belonging to him red with shame. Me they did not like. I was always polite, more from dread of the loss of personal dignity and from a weak-kneed love of peace than from any higher motive. A feeble, timorous habit of this kind causes a gulf to open between people who live under the same roof. My father, in his outbursts of passion, leapt across, and those whom he flew upon did not resent his conduct: but I remained for ever upon the other side.

My nurse had long ago gone back to Scotland, and no one sang now. Once, while I was still a child, I had found the key of the drawingroom piano in the lock.

I had opened it.

I had picked out the tune of "Dundee."

Just as I was about to repeat this—to me—extremely beautiful performance, my father came in.

“Father!” I said, “I want to learn to play.”

The look of utter astonishment on my father's face alarmed me even more than the frown that I had looked instinctively to see.

“What for?” he said.

I could not give a reason.

I daresay Rubinstein, if he had been asked, at that age, why he wanted to learn to play, could not have given a reason either.

In those days I still felt younger than my father; but now that I had grown up, we presented an odd contrast. Spite of his iron-gray hair and the many lines on his narrow forehead, his was the youthfulness, the stir, the bustle, the excitement of life in a crowd, the eager interest in affairs of the day. I—a recluse by nature and never more of a recluse than during those first years of consciousness—lived like a student of sixty, absorbed in books, careful of my latter end, taking no risks because nothing tempted me to do so.

Religion moved me secretly and strongly, but only after a personal manner, not with any view to public reform, to evangelization, to work amongst the poor. The simple lessons of my good nurse remained with me. The example of the good man who was my tutor bore fruit. I was no Gallio. I cared about these things. I read the inky volumes through and through. At that time I existed but to read—to study languages, for which I have always entertained a ridiculous affection, considering the difficulty that I find in expressing myself in my own—to dream—to brood upon the transitoriness of this world. The thought was a refuge to me when quite bowed down by the material force of it. I was little affected by the chance that I might yet remain in it forty or fifty years. I prepared for death in short, not for life. I could not face the immediate future. It meant that I should be condemned to enter the business, to adopt the kind of occupation that resulted in furniture and servants and

a house and ways of going on like ours. I looked beyond.

The earth was cold about me : but never having known the warmth of sympathy I was not conscious that I lacked it, and I supposed the deep dissatisfaction, the loneliness that I experienced, the need of some one, to be the common lot of every man. Soldiers appeared to enjoy certain moments ; but all the writers of sermons assured me that life was a poor business, and I was quite disposed to believe them. I had hopes and aspirations that nothing outside me justified. I drew the conclusion that they pointed on, to another scene altogether.

XIV

AS I grew to manhood I became aware of a new atmosphere of consideration that surrounded me.

It was because I was going to be—so every one said—*very rich*.

My cousin was, apparently, the first to discover it.

She was then a newly married woman, just come to town, with a younger sister *à marier*. Casting about for an eligible partner, she decided on me. Her husband was a City magnate, and my father had been, for many years, well-known in the City. It was a shame, she declared, that a young man with prospects like mine should not be given every advantage. Neither my father nor my tutor had realized that I was grown up.

She spoke to me about it, and I felt grateful to her for her sympathy, and expressed perfect willingness to make the most of any and every advantage that she could prevail upon my father to afford me. I might not have been as wax in her hands if I had gauged her power or suspected her motive ; for though I liked her well, I had no desire to become her brother-in-law. Secretly, I entertained little hope of her success.

The right expression in the mouth of the right person goes a long way, however. She did it all with two words—*very rich*.

Because I was going to be *very rich*, she spoke to my tutor, she compelled him to think it was his duty to take steps in the matter. She left him no rest until he made urgent representations to my father, to the effect that I ought to be allowed to complete my education by attending lectures at University College.

“A man who has not been at one of the Universities is nowhere,” she said. “Your father will have nothing to say to Oxford

or Cambridge. Very well. University College *sounds* like a University! University College is the next best thing."

It was because I was going to be *very rich* that she persuaded my father to have me taught riding and dancing, "exercises" which as she said, "befitted my station."

I was nothing loth. At University College I did well; I loved the place where people could be found who cared for books; and active exercise was of great benefit to my health, which had begun to flag in the close air of the library. At her instigation and with her approval also, I became a volunteer.

"It makes a man hold himself straight like nothing else," she said.

Sacred enthusiasm filled my heart when, in the company of two other youthful patriots, on a wet, muddy afternoon, attired in stiff, uncomfortable uniform, the buttons of which were always coming off, I heard the raucous voice of the drill sergeant exclaim, "Fifty-fifth Middlesex, prepare to receive cavalry!"

A little later, when my cousin had had

time to make her own way in society, and to assure herself that her pains were not entirely wasted on me, it was because I was going to be *very rich* that numerous invitations to the houses of people, who were all very rich themselves, began to pour in on me. Every one of these I declined by return of post, feeling very proud and grand as I did so. These were the children whom I had wanted so much long ago. They would not play with me then; now they wanted to play with me. No! It was too late! I had learned to do without them. I had “put away childish things.” I preferred books,—books, and the prospect of Eternity.

I laugh now as I think of the airs that I gave myself, but then I felt extremely contemptuous. Had they no idea, these people, of the extreme stupidity of being *very rich*? If I had the misfortune to become *very rich*—I did not think it possible, I might have expected the fall of a pyramid sooner than the death of any one so much more solidly built than myself as my father—

I had made up my mind what to do. I would give away everything except the few hundred pounds that would save me from dependence in case of accident. I did not want to part with my substance from generosity, but because I hated to be responsible and disliked the close attention that money requires. I did not know at the time, that very little requires even closer attention than very much. I was a prudent young man. I had a horror of becoming even more dull than I was, but a still greater horror of existing on benefits. It is the curse of families who have lived by careful thrift for two or three generations, that their young people are born old. My admiration of the life of daring and adventure was keen as ever. I could not see a regiment pass down the street but I longed to run away, to take the Queen's shilling, to trudge along the road beside those fine fellows who were all for death and glory. But in my heart I knew that life was not for me.

God gave me all of it that could be mine in a friend.

Lucilla, of him I cannot speak! He only, of all those called by remembrance to your little room, was not there. He only, when—on the sudden failure of that life which had been granted me for the last few years—I questioned all the rest for its meaning, I lived it through again to cry:—*What was the meaning, if not this friendship with you?*—he only was not there.

I met him first about the time of which I have been speaking. He was but an acquaintance then. Conscious that he had everything—I nothing—to offer, I shrank from forcing myself upon him.

It was not till afterwards that I became his friend, but he was mine from the first.

Even apart from this, I was beginning to feel keener interest in life. Certain powers of imagination awoke, and fed by the sweet air of encouragement and approval at College, they grew like the gourd that sprang up in a night.

Once more the Jacobite gentry came to my aid. The College authorities proposed

an essay on the great Scotch leaders in the cause of the Stuarts.

I dreamed of it by day and thought of it by night. I devoted every spare moment to the study of the scarlet shelf in the library. I became as Stevenson says, "a great friend to paper-makers." Many waste-paper baskets stand behind the scenes of even the very slightest success in letters. I fulfilled this primary condition; waste-paper basket after waste-paper basket I filled; and in the end my essay was the best. I cannot say that I felt surprised. I had known that it must be. The other students were writing as a task. I was writing to prove there was something in me beyond the power of addition and subtraction. I was writing to justify myself in an attempt to escape from everything that made life not worth living. I was writing for love of the heroes of childhood. It was a more vital affair to me than it was to the others. I was not surprised therefore, but I was much elated.

It was my twenty-first birthday.

I read my name at the top of the Class List, and then I walked home through the busy streets, eager, happy, my heart full of humility and thanksgiving.

I would go, flushed with success, to my father. He would see that there was something in me, that I was not fit for office work, that he must set me free to follow my own bent. I remember how brightly the lamps were shining on that winter night, with what a friendly air the stars looked down.

At home I found my cousin in the library. She had looked in to remonstrate with me about an invitation to a dance, which I had just declined. I took her hand and told her of my good luck.

“I am so glad, Oliver,” she said blandly. “About the Jacobites? Oh yes, delightful! I never thought Cromwell was a gentleman. What’s that? Your father coming in?”

It was the footstep in the hall. For the first time—so happy and safe I was,—my heart did not sink as I heard it.

“Father!” I said, going up to him as he

entered. "I've come out first at College for an essay on the Jacobites."

And suddenly the words froze on my lips just as they had frozen long ago when I asked to learn music, at the look of gray bewilderment on his face.

"Indeed," he said. "That shows it is waste of time and money to keep you there."

I was taken away from College at the end of the term and set to work as a clerk.

XV

“ *LEAVING* a perpetual remembrance, thou art gone ; in thy death thou wert even such as in thy life : wealth to the poor, hope to the desponding, support to the weak. Thou couldst meet desperate troubles with a spirit that knew not despair, and breathe might into the trembling.

“ *The Lord of China owes thee thanks for thy benefits ; the throne of his ancient kingdom hath not been cast down.*

“ *And where the Nile unites the divided strength of his streams, a city saw thee long-suffering. A multitude dwelt therein, but thine alone was the valour that guarded it through all that year, when by day and by night thou didst keep watch against the host of*

the Arabians, who went around it to devour it, with spears thirsting for blood.

“Thy death was not wrought by the God of War, but by the frailties of thy friends. For thy country and for all men God blessed the work of thy hand. Hail, stainless warrior! Hail, thrice victorious hero! Thou livest, and shalt teach aftertimes to reverence the counsel of the Everlasting Father.”

So things went on until the year of the War in the Soudan.

Crushed, weary, overworked, ill, sick at heart because of ceaseless drudgery, my transitory interest in the life of this world was fading out by that time. The overwhelming interest of another grew every day more strong.

It is the tendency of each one of us to think himself alone and singular in suffering. Doubtless there was many another in my case. I suppose there are living now thousands of middle-aged men and women who remember what that year was to them. I suppose there stands on many a shelf a little black Thomas

à Kempis with a date scrawled at the beginning, a resolution to read it in memory of that strange warrior who found his tactics in its pages.

At last there stood on earth a man whom saints disputed for with heroes. The reign of Heaven on earth was, in one man, begun.

He had been offered the contents of a room packed from floor to ceiling with gold, and had refused it as if it were dross.

I heard all the people who were *very rich* saying how wonderful this was. I felt glad that he had done it, of course, but to me that was his least title to honour.

He had put by the crown of Fame as if it were made of paper. There I bent my knee to him.

He fought for nothing in Time, but for the Lord. Had he been cruel as Dundee, cold as Wellington, I had adored him ; but he was on fire with mercy and pity.

When Charles George Gordon went to Khartoum, he carried me with him. I followed his course from day to day. I saw the

dusty figure on the tall camel, jogging through the desert. I saw the Bible and the gleaming sword. I saw the entrance into the city—the stern blue eyes, bright when they rested on a child. I stood in the crowded market, to watch the posting of the proclamation. I heard the cheers, the murmurs, the tales told there of wise and happy ruling in the past—of his ride, unprotected, into the midst of the enemy's camp, to bring back peace.

When Gordon asked for the great Slave-driver, my brain reeled with astonishment for a moment; I had enough of the theologian in me for that, but I did not waver. If he wanted Zebehr, if he wanted the tyrant he had done his utmost to destroy, if he wanted the Devil for that matter, the Devil was the person to go. I lived in white and silent rage for days after Zebehr was refused. I had thought that I was a Liberal: Gladstone fell from his place in my esteem like a stone.

After that, I beheld, my own heart tightening, the lines drawn close and closer—the digging of the trenches—the entanglements of

barbed wire—the arming of the steamers—the cannon on the roof of the Palace—the defence growing every day bolder and more imaginative as Hope, by inches, died. Still, Hope was absolute in me, I did not admit the possibility of defeat; but I could not sleep.

The night to which I now go back in thought—the night on which the kindled torches of grief and joy flashed on the deadness of my mortal nature, and kindled that also into life, is the night on which London learnt the Fall of Khartoum.

In stupefied rebellion, in a dim wild agony of revolt I sat, my eyes glued to the paper.

I doubted the existence of God.

“Ah well!” my father had said when I came in, speechless, and pointed to the news. “Gordon was mad, of course.”

In thought I, at that moment, became a murderer. I would have killed my father if I could.

I do not know how long I had sat in an intensity of passion that crowded years into hours when the door opened.

Something was said that I did not hear nor heed ; and two ladies entered.

“ May I ask the favour of a few minutes in private with you ? ” the elder of the two inquired.

If it had not been for the utter bewilderment of my senses, I should have noticed my father's unusual politeness. Few visitors came to our house, and when they did they received little encouragement. He begged the younger lady to be seated, and left the room with her companion. I remained dully sitting where I was. I had not even the good manners to rise. I suppose she saw the paper in my hand.

“ Is there any news to-night ? ” she said, turning to me as soon as the door had closed.

I had almost said *No* : but first I looked at her, as she sat by my father's writing-table. The tall lamp stood behind her, and she was wearing a dark hat so that I scarcely saw her face at all, only two great dark eyes looking straight into mine.

“Yes!” I said, slowly. “Khartoum has fallen.”

It was a curious relief to my heart to say the words. Madness passed from it as I spoke.

She clutched her hands together.

“Gordon?” she said in a kind of cry.

“Gordon is dead.”

The light of the stars went out. She hid her face, I saw her whole frame shaken with weeping. By her weeping she saved two worlds for me; and yet I could not endure to see it.

“Listen!” I said fiercely. “*There is God.*”

She did not speak. She could not; but she held out her hand. . . .

Voices out in the hall; and my one thought, to screen her!

I came forward, spoke rapidly to my father to distract his attention. What nonsense I repeated, I do not know.

They stayed only a few minutes longer. There was one more word for me. The elder lady passed out first, and, as my father busied

himself helping her on with her mantle, I touched the girl on the shoulder.

“We cannot meet here! Will you wait for me? Will you write?” I whispered low in her ear.

Once more the stars shone.

“I will wait,” she said. “Yes, I will write.”

She touched my hand—turned—hurried from me.

She was going out at the door, and the door was the door of Lucilla’s room and yet the door of the library in the old house at Bayswater, when Lucilla raised her eyes from the book and looked at me.

“Do you remember what day this is?” she asked.

I shook my head. Yet her question fitted my thoughts in some way. There was no interruption.

“It is the 26th of January,” she said, “the day of the Fall of Khartoum.”

I signed to her that I wanted music, and she went to the piano and began to play.

She could not see me as she sat ; and before the sweet notes ceased I rose from my couch and stole away.

There was more remembering for me yet, but not of that which, in the room with her, I dared to recollect.

XVI

SCARCELY upon the night of its occurrence, on the first 26th of January, had that scene in the library appeared more real than it was to me, though I had not suspected the anniversary as I lay on the sofa in Lucilla's room.

I was shaking with fright as I hobbled downstairs again.

I felt myself still too weak to be in the clutches of Memory, when Memory was not the sweet-scented dead-roseleaf affair that she is at most times, but rather the vulture of Prometheus. I shuddered at the thought of going through again anything like the tortures of longing—of the doing to death of hope slowly, little by little—that brought

me, in the months which followed that night, to the edge of despair.

Whether I was too much exhausted in body for my mind to work any more—whether Lucilla had played the vulture to sleep—I know not; but certain it is that I went to rest and rested, and that I rose up next morning, refreshed and strong.

Mahry brought me down a note with an inquiry as to how I had passed the night, and a friendly invitation to come upstairs to tea again that very afternoon, if I felt able. I added it to the collection that I already possessed, with a sigh. I smiled to myself a little sadly as I wrote the only possible answer. Women are always so anxious that two and two should not make four.

When she had satisfied herself that the music of the night before had charmed away my weakness—when she had professed her eager willingness to play to me again whatever I preferred to hear,

“Lucilla,” I said, “do you never play for a dead woman?”

“Do you wish me to play for one?” she inquired, an unusual expression on her face. I could not, for the life of me, tell whether she wanted the answer to be *Yes* or *No*.

“Yes,” I said, “I should like you to play for a girl who died long ago.”

“Are you sure she is dead?” said Lucilla, turning round abruptly. She spoke for once just as most people speak, and I felt annoyed.

“She is dead to me.”

“I will not play for her,” said Lucilla, “I do not believe she is dead at all. You cared for her. You care for her still.”

“Yes,” I said, “I care for her so much that, from the day I saw her, I have never spoken of her till now. I shall always care for her. She saved my life once.”

For the first time when I spoke of a matter that seriously interested me, Lucilla showed no interest whatever.

She kept silence.

“I know nothing about your life,” she observed, rather wilfully.

“There is little enough to know.”

I suppose I glanced down at my lame leg, for she said, with more tenderness,

“You were not lame always. What was it that made you lame?”

“Admiration of a hero; and one of those results of fixed laws which we call accident.”

“Never mind the fixed laws! Tell me about the hero and the accident.”

“You can imagine who the hero was,” I said, glancing at the statuette on the mantelpiece.

“Gordon?”

“It was at the Service in memory of him—outside the Abbey. A rough knocked down a woman in the crowd. I fought him. You cannot think what fun it was, at such close quarters. Don’t be admiring, please! I should never have done it, if I had known what the result would be. And the woman was drunk. I daresay the rough turned out, after all, the better specimen of the two. It only lasted a minute. The ground was

slippery, I fell against a lamp post, and the bone of my leg snapped."

"*She* came and nursed you, I suppose?" asked Lucilla, still as if she were inquiring into the character of a dressmaker who had cheated her.

"If she had done that, I might perhaps have walked again like any one else."

"How long is it since you saw her last?"

"Nineteen years to a day."

The statement affected her in some way, for her manner changed. She left the piano, and came over to her usual seat beside the fire.

"That's a very long time ago."

"It did not seem long to me last night."

"You saw her very often?"

"Once only."

"Why only once?" she cried, fire kindling in her dark eyes.

I hesitated.

Unwittingly, she who so seldom asked questions had asked me one, the answer to which involved such pain in the rousing

of old sorrow, that I could not choose but hesitate.

“You need not tell me unless you like,” she said. “I’m sure I do not want to know.”

I wished Lucilla would leave off being like other people. It suited her ill.

I tried speaking the truth. If the refuge of silence were interdicted, the plain, dull, naked truth was my only resource. “Something happened which made it impossible for me to think of marriage,” I said stupidly.

“The accident? You could not believe that she would mind that?” Lucilla said, with a thin tremble in her voice. “If she had anything at all in her, she would have cared for you the more because you were lame. She could have done things for you: it would have made her happier.”

“Would it really have added so much to her happiness?” I said, smiling. “Perhaps it would. I have been told that women are like that—some women. I never had the chance of testing it. The accident happened too long after.”

“After what?”

“Must I tell you?”

“Good gracious!” Lucilla said, and she was cold and sharp as steel again. “You speak as if you had committed a crime.”

“My father did commit a crime.”

She started so violently that a pang shot through me. Was I about to risk her friendship by telling her of my father’s disgrace? Surely it could not be. That was not like Lucilla. But it made me resolve to tell her at once.

“My father committed forgery,” I said.

“She gave you up because of *that*?” Lucilla asked.

Once more I felt relieved. Lucilla did not intend to give me up because of *that*—so much was clear. She spoke as if it were the merest trifle.

“I did what any man would have done under the circumstances. My name was dishonoured; I had not a penny left. I made no attempt to see her again.”

“And your father?”

“I could do nothing for him. He had run away from it all.”

“Do not speak—if you cannot,” she said again, in her own voice.

“I would rather tell you now that I have begun. It was on the morning after the Fall of Khartoum. My father was found dead in his chair. He had learnt, the night before, that exposure was inevitable.”

“You had money of your own, money that was yours by right, through your mother—you gave it up to save his credit, left yourself penniless?”

“You knew, all the time?”

“I only guessed. I heard a story something like it, a long while ago. Besides, I always thought you must be living here, somehow or other, by your own choice.”

“I had no choice in the matter. Would you have felt that you had any?”

“No,” said Lucilla reluctantly, after a long pause.

She is given to admire in others actions

that she herself would perform as a matter of course. I experienced a momentary triumph at having brought her to bay.

“Now *you*?” I said, “you really chose to come to this house. You need not have done so?”

She smiled—a smile with depths in it, like the smile of Mona Lisa.

“I had to come.”

“Why?”

“The money that my aunt left me had cost life. I could not have borne to touch it. I gave it to a Hospital, that it might bring back life again. I had a little of my own; and I made more by teaching, and reading aloud, and painting. So things were never very difficult.”

“It does not matter much where you live. You would make it home always.”

“I think I could—if I were free. Freedom is the one thing that matters. After the first—of course that was terrible—I daresay you were glad to be free from all the heavy responsibilities, from the enormous gloomy

house that very rich London people always live in ? ”

She spoke as if she had seen it.

“I should have been glad, only then, you see, I fell lame.”

“O,” she said, looking ready to cry. “I forgot that.”

“Do not mind ! It was then that I found a friend. When he saw me tumble down, he picked me up. Every day while I lay ill he came to see me, and cared for me as tenderly as any woman. I had thought that I could not bear to be at once poor and dependent. He never let me feel that I was.”

“And does he never come to see you now ? ”

I did not answer.

“I see,” she said softly. “He too is among the dead.”

“He died at the Atbara.”

She honoured silently with me all those who had fallen. I wonder if there is any monument that a man need covet so greatly

as the pause that follows after his name if he has died well.

“And what became of you? How did you live?”

“After he went away to Egypt? I hardly recollect. I was condemned by a Doctor to live abroad for two or three winters. If you know the way to do it, you can starve in a Swiss *pension* without much personal discomfort. In fact it quite restored my health. I scribbled for the Press—I translated books that nobody cared to read—when I came home I looked up authorities in the British Museum—I read and copied manuscripts. At last an old uncle died, and left me enough to enter a solicitor’s office. I live very well now, and have more than enough.”

“You have been cruel to her, I think,” Lucilla said slowly.

“Cruel to *her*?”

“Yes; you asked her to wait. How could she tell why it was that you never came near her?”

“She must have known what happened. It was in all the papers.”

“She wrote to you.”

“Not a word.”

“*I am quite sure she wrote to you.*”

I began to feel annoyed with Lucilla again. What business had she to be so certain when she knew nothing about the matter?

“She never wrote,” I said. “Why should she have written?”

A thousand times in the year of my misery I had asked myself this question, as I sat waiting, waiting, in the great bare library from which my well loved books were gone, and all day long, and half the night, post after post came in without the letter that it should have brought. I had answered myself so many times, “There is no reason why she should,” that at last I believed it. Now, nineteen years after, came Lucilla, to make me doubt again!

“Why should she have written?” I repeated.

“She was bound to write. Besides, she could not have helped it.”

I sat silent.

Her voice expressed something that had spoken long ago in my own heart.

“Well,” I said, with deliberation, “at any rate I know more of her than you do. The fact remains, that she did not write. I dare say she married someone else after a year or two. She is, you may be sure, a happy wife and mother. And now you understand perhaps why I said she was dead to me.”

“But I *know* she wrote,” said Lucilla. “The letter was lost—that’s why you never heard. The house must have been all in confusion after a dreadful thing like that. The servants mislaid it.”

I shook my head. The servants never mislaid anything in our house.

Lucilla’s eyes, when she turned and looked at me, were soft with tears. I had not seen such a thing before. It distressed, and at the same time it pleased me.

“Dear friend,” I said, “do not trouble yourself. It is better as it is. I should have hated to drag her down—and then my lameness !”

“I cannot bear it,” said Lucilla. “All these years she might have been helping you.”

“The memory of her has helped me always—when things were at the worst.”

“You must find her,” Lucilla said. “You will find her still.”

I rose, bade her good-night, and went downstairs to my room.

I was miserably agitated. When first we stir with words dark depths of consciousness that have lain silent for many years, we hardly know what it is that comes to the surface.

XVII

WOMEN are terribly practical. My friendship with Lucilla had taught me that much. I began to regret what I had done. I feared to see her again lest she should say, that I must, without delay, set forth on a pilgrimage in quest of a lady, whom, after the lapse of nineteen years, it was more than probable that I should not even recognise if I saw her.

Lucilla said nothing of the kind, however.

She was too wise to fall into the error of many sympathetic women who go on expressing their sympathy, time after time, until the exhausted receiver grows weary. She made no allusion to what had passed. She talked of this and that—our tiny household politics—my cousin, Mrs. Hopgood, and her

anxiety about Frida, who had just begun to assert herself, and wanted go to the Royal College of Music, like Kitty—the last news from Australia.

“Kitty is happier than ever.”

She lingered lovingly over the words, but she did not offer to read me the letter that had come for her by the last mail.

Great as my relief was, I felt surprised. Is it so easy to be back on the old terms? What had happened to restore her serenity since the day when she announced that she had not been faithful? Quickly and mysteriously as she had gone away, she had come back again; but why?

My eyes fell by chance on the old mirror, on the words engraved beneath, “*Hier c’est demain.*” Whoever wrote them knew a woman like this, one who kept faith. There might be hours of night between, but yesterday would be to-morrow; after all, *why* matters very little.

I had not then committed an indiscretion in telling her so much. I was not to be made

to pay for it. Our gentle, familiar intimacy would go on as before, untroubled by her deeper knowledge. The hidden life, which I had dragged forward with such pain, sank back into the depths. Every trifling commonplace act, every single word reassured me. She would never make me repent of my confidence. It was all well. Nay, it was better than before, because she knew.

“By the way,” she said, when I rose to bid her good-night, “where is the book that you promised to lend me? You promised it, three weeks ago.”

Three weeks ago! How could I be expected to know what I had promised in those prehistoric ages?

“What was it? I am afraid I have forgotten.”

“It was a *Life of Somebody*, by *Somebody*,” Lucilia said, slightly frowning. “You must remember; you said every one ought to read it. I daresay I shall not get through. I do not care for *Lives*, as a rule.”

“You lose much,” I observed, not un-

willing to prolong my stay by a friendly argument. We held very different notions concerning books.

She took the ball, but rather as one who did not want the game to stop, than as one who cared greatly about winning.

“What do I lose, except a little trumpery gossip? If I want to know what men have done, I read history. If I want to know what they ought to have done, I read romance.”

Lucilla's attitude in this matter was not unknown to me, and I regretted it. I thought she deprived herself (and me) of much innocent pleasure, through her scorn of biography. In her eyes, as in those of many women, it was but so much raw material, out of which, given the proper craftsman, a good novel might be constructed. In person I find it, as a rule, easier to read a bad Life than a good Novel, so weak is my imagination, so strong my interest in my fellow-creatures. And as she could not read Lives, and I could not read Novels, we both read much that it was impossible for us to discuss.

Lucilla, of course, read more for what books suggested than for what they could tell her. She read so much of herself into them, that I had been woefully disappointed sometimes when I essayed to follow in her steps.

She would tell me a glowing tale, full of mysterious perils, of wit, of courage, of characters original as those of *Fanny Hill* out for a holiday.

Enchanted with the brilliancy of her description, I would take the rash step of going to the Library in search of this treasure of a novel, believing that now at last the longed for successor of R. L. Stevenson was really come. I got it easily enough. I carried it home, full of triumph. In the chill solitude of my den I sat down to peruse it. Alas, what was gold to her was only dead leaves to me! Where she saw all the myriad forms of life, I saw nothing but flat incompetence.

She had that singleness of aim which is peculiar to feminine readers. If the book fired her imagination, that was all she demanded. The author might violate nature and truth

at every turn, and she cared nothing. She had a magnificent disregard of style—even of grammar—in the interests of “the story.” Nothing annoyed her more than what she was pleased to call “correcting the press.” She had not the remotest feeling for that fine age of accuracy when scholars took each other’s lives, because they held divergent views as to the position of a comma.

The real reason of her neglect of biography was, perhaps, that it told her too much, that it hemmed her in with facts when fancy was all that she wanted. She liked to dress the doll herself, not to have it dressed for her.

“One good character in a Novel is worth fifty Lives,” she observed carelessly, as I sat silent, pondering on this idiosyncrasy of her disposition.

“Not always ! Dr. Johnson is much better fun in Boswell than he is in ‘The Virginians’.”

“*Boswell’s Life of Johnson* ! That was it,” she exclaimed. “You said everybody ought to read that.”

“A general proposition that there is no disputing!”

“Will you lend it to me now?”

“Gladly. Mine is an old edition in ten volumes.”

Lucilla's face fell.

“Have you read them all?”

“I have read the first nine till I know them almost by heart; but I have never gone further than the middle of the tenth.”

“Then, the next time you come,” said Lucilla, (“mind, I am in no hurry for it!) bring me the tenth volume. The tenth volume of *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. I will begin where you left off. If I can read the tenth, then I will read all the rest.”

A most fantastic reason; but I knew her too well to attempt remonstrance. I bowed to her decision, and went downstairs.

It occurred to me to wonder a little, that she should have asked so urgently for a book, whose very title she had forgotten.

In the beginning of our acquaintance, when I often recommended volumes that, later on,

I knew she never could have cared to read, I noticed that she graciously let their names drop. She had not time just then—she was busy with something else. She never wounded me, but she held her own, and by degrees I came to understand that her reading was as free as every other action of hers, and that no one influenced, or ever could aspire to influence her choice.

Why was she going to read Boswell?

For the first time I doubted Bozzy. I felt myself uncertain of his power to amuse.

She was going to read him to please me—that we might have some recognized subject to talk about. She was going to read Dr. Johnson's Life in order that I might not be afraid that she meant to speak again of my own.

A week later I dug out volume ten from his fellows, and carried it up to her. I wished that she had not desired to see that volume. As I touched the cover, a host of painful and bitter thoughts rushed back upon me.

“It is very dusty,” she said, with dis-

approval. "I can see that you have not read it for a long time."

"No," I said, "I do not recollect a word."

"And yet you know the others by heart?"

"Yes."

"Why did you treat this one so badly? Did you not care about the end?"

"Too many other things came to an end for me when I was reading that."

"Ah, forgive me!" she cried quickly, "you were reading it when—when your father died?"

I stood as in a dream. The whole day came back to me.

"Yes," I said. "It was the 27th of January, 1885, the day after the Fall of Khartoum,—the day after that night. They came and told me about my father. I went to see. There were hours, long hours—it was the only time when they left me alone. They pulled the blinds down. It was quiet and dark. No one knew yet. I thought about the night before. I felt as if it must have been I, I myself, that had killed my father.

The book was lying on the table, where I had laid it down the night before, when I went out to buy that paper. I read and read as if I were taking opium; I read till I could scarcely see. It grew dark then, quite dark. Some one came in with an ugly, absurd, long face to say, 'Would I come and give directions about the coffin?' I put a mark in the book, I remember, because it gave me a minute's respite. I know I meant to come back to it. Somehow I never could."

"Of course you could not."

She was sitting by the fire, and I heard her sigh gently as she turned over the dusty leaves.

All at once she drew a quick, sharp breath. I looked up.

"Nothing!" she said, in the voice of one repressing some strong excitement. "I happened to open the book just where you must have stopped reading. Look! Here is the mark! You must have thrust it in—forgotten it. You never broke the seal. Look!"

There between the pages, the ink dry and

faded, lay an old letter. The writing bore an odd likeness to her own, I noticed that at once, but the hand was very young and unformed.

“Her letter—her letter to you!” Lucilla said. “I told you that she wrote.”

As in a dream I took the letter from her and sat silent, gazing at that old Bayswater address.

“Open it!” she said imperiously. “It deserves to be read now, any way.”

I obeyed.

She seemed to know by intuition when I had done.

“Well?”

Her eyes were fixed on me with a look between triumph and suspense.

“Yes,” I said, “you are right. If I had read this nineteen years ago, it would have made a great difference.”

“Can it make no difference now?” she enquired.

“I am not going to look for her, if that is what you mean,” I said, doggedly.

“ You never really cared about her then ? ”

I made no answer.

“ Would you do anything that I asked you to do ? ” she said quickly.

“ Yes.”

“ Would you burn that letter ? ”

I hesitated. I grew indignant. I thought she had no right to ask that.

“ I cannot. Think how long I have waited for it. Nineteen years ! ”

“ Mere sentiment ! ” she said. “ If you will not burn it, will you let me see it ? ”

I was beyond measure astonished. Still—
if she could ask such a thing——

I held it out.

I did not like doing so ; but Man is the fool of consistency, and it seemed odd to say I would do anything she liked, and then refuse her twice. Besides, I had the words by heart :

“ Dear Friend (it ran).

I grieve for everything that grieves you Remember
what you said There was light yesterday There will
be light to-morrow Remember that I will always wait
for you

Your Friend ”

“No name! No address!” Lucilla said. “Perhaps she did not mean to wait for you, after all.”

I wondered why Lucilla smiled so brightly as she said this. It was unreasonable to feel vexed—but the reasons of our vexation are seldom reasonable.

“She was very unpractical if she did.”

I could not deny it.

“Girls *are* unpractical,” Lucilla said. “You never tried to find out her name?”

“Never. When, to the best of my belief, no letter came, I thought quite naturally that she felt shocked at what had happened, at my father’s conduct—that she would have nothing more to do with me.”

“Tell me the rest!” Lucilla said gently.

“The lady who came with her—her mother or her aunt, I suppose—had insisted that my father should give back at once a large sum of money that he owed. He had lived all those years under a false name to avoid paying. He had forged the signature of her husband at the time that he borrowed it.

Borrowing is the word, you know, if you happen to be what is called a gentleman. Gentlemen never *steal*.—Mrs. Hopgood? Oh yes, she was my mother's cousin, our only near relation on this side of the water!—How was she taken in? My father made her think that he had changed his name on account of a legacy. At first he had been really unable to pay, you understand. Afterwards the love of money grew. Yet I believe he always meant to pay in the end; they always do mean that. At the moment when this lady found him out—tracked him down—very properly claimed her due—he was involved in some heavy speculation. Payment—exposure—whichever alternative he faced, meant ruin. He gave her a cheque, but he knew that it could not be honoured; that as soon as it was refused, the world would know everything. I believe that he appealed to her mercy in vain. I do not wonder. She had had to wait many years.”

“She could not have guessed what would happen.”

“Of course not. It was in all the papers directly after, though. She must have known then; any one who lived with her must have known. As soon as I had done what I could—as soon as I felt sure there was going to be no letter for me—I took my mother’s name, for that was stainless; and went abroad.”

“Did you tell no one?”

“My friend knew, of course. My cousin rather added to the difficulties of life in those days, and I did not try to keep up with her. She was very kind, but she held that I had no right to dispose of what was my own—that I ought not to let it go out of the family.”

“Ah!” said Lucilla, smiling, “I can imagine.”

“I thought we should be better friends if we had no opportunity of contradicting each other for a time. I was right, as things turned out. She lost sight of me so completely that she thought I was dead. When she saw me again, she did not know me at first. I suppose I was greatly changed.

However, I explained that I was only the same thing under another title. She has been very kind to me since."

"Did you forget?" Lucilla said, "that there was some one else—some one whom you had asked to wait?"

"No, but I had no right to expect that she would remember."

"Is it not strange to think," Lucilla said, "that perhaps, while we are sitting here over the fire, perhaps this very night, she is waiting? She is an old maid by this time. She has little set ways of her own, and her hair has grown gray."

"No, no," I said, "not that! Nineteen. I do not think she can have been a day older. I myself was only just twenty-one. For me she will be nineteen always."

"What colour *was* her hair?" said Lucilla.

"I do not know. I saw herself, not her hair."

"If you could see her again at this moment, simply because you wished it, would you wish?"

“No, not if she is some one else’s wife ; and probably she is.”

“She may be dead.”

“I think not.”

“I think with you,” Lucilla said, “I think she is still alive, waiting. I think she lives in a little room like mine. I think she keeps a bright fire burning ; and she has friends. But she is always waiting.”

Strange, how feebly the idea of this other little room appealed to me ! I did not want to see it.

“Well, then, she must wait !” I said. “I don’t know where her little room is, and I am quite happy in this one.”

Again Lucilla smiled.

“Give me back my letter, please !”

She gave it back to me without a word.

XVIII

IT was an odd thing that, having got this letter, I did not know what to do with it.

I had a vague idea of never being parted from it, of having it buried with me in my grave.

Just to try how it would feel there, I laid it under my pillow when I went to bed; but it made me as uncomfortable as if it were alive. I could not sleep a wink for it, and, being prosaically anxious to go to work again as usual next morning, I had to put it away.

Every day it troubled me more. It was like a cry out of the past, the cry of an unknown something for something unknown. It is harassing to keep a perpetual cry out of the past in your waistcoat pocket.

What if Lucilla were right? What if this young lady—now no longer young—should be really waiting? I dismissed the thought as absurd; but thought is a servant that, however often dismissed, always returns, demanding higher wages than before.

I forgot it, however, when the time came for me to go upstairs to the drawingroom floor.

Serenity and peace I had always found there, until the night when I told Lucilla that I was happier than I had ever been. There was more than peace and serenity now. There was a force of joyfulness about her that nothing could withstand. Every doubt, every grief, every fear vanished in her presence.

She was looking forward eagerly to the next mail from Australia, she told me.

Of course she was, but I did not feel, this time, as if her steady happiness were all for Kitty. I knew it was her own. I knew it to be so solid that I risked giving it a little shake. Why were confidences to be all on my side?

“What an odd thing memory is!” I said. “The shadow comes to be more than the substance. The shadow grows so strong that people are afraid to free themselves from it, even to clasp the substance. I wish I could feel that I had set myself free, as you have done. It is not so long ago since you could not be happy with me, nor let me be happy with you, on account of some one whom you would never see again.”

“I ought not to have said that,” observed Lucilla thoughtfully. “Never is too long a word. I did see him again!” And she glanced up at *The Unknown*.

At once those jealous fears rushed back upon my heart.

“Was it the night you were out so long?”

“Ah no!” she said, half pityingly, half as if she were amused. “That was the night dear old Mrs. Trump was so ill—before she had to go to the Infirmary. I was sitting up with her. That was why I did not get home till late. There was no one else who could come before eleven.”

The agonies I had gone through! And all the time Lucilla was sitting peacefully by dear old Mrs. Trump, watching the goldfish swim round and round in their bowl. What a waste of good emotion! I went back to my other agony.

“Shall you see him when you go away? You are going away, you know. You told me so on the 26th January.”

“Quite true!” she said musingly. “I was going away because of him. I had determined to pay a little visit to Kitty’s father and mother. One can think more clearly away from home; but now I know he does not want me in the least, and I am not going.”

There was not a shadow of regret in her tone.

“Will he never want you to go away?”

“Never.”

“Heaven’s blessing on him!” said I.

Again her radiant smile shone out.

It was March now. The wild winds blustered. The bare boughs strained and

budded. Wild showers of rain swept, like a lyre, across blue sky.

One evening, as I sat reading for the thousandth time my little brown old letter, wondering for the thousandth time where the writer of it could be, I heard the piano above stairs begin to play, very softly, *Les Adieux*.

The next night Lucilla played *L'Absence*, and broke off.

On the third night she ought, of course, to have played *Le Retour*, but she did not. She played *Les Adieux* and *L'Absence*, one after the other; and stopped short.

I think now that there came to her, in mercy, a warning, a presentiment.

Casting about at the time for something to explain her mood, I said to myself:

“The Australian mail is late because of the winds. That is why she feels anxious; but it will come with the last post.”

The next day was Thursday.

As soon as I crossed the threshold, I knew that something had happened. A darkness hung about Lucilla's eyes, a grave and gentle

tenderness was in her manner, that boded ill from the first. Yet I had not courage to ask; and she, brave as she was in everything, had no courage to speak.

There was a bright fire on the hearth.

We ate and drank almost in silence, conscious that we were only delaying the moment that must come for both at last.

“Why have you been going away and never coming back again these last three nights?” I asked, forcing myself to speak as if I had remarked nothing unusual. “You made me feel so wretched that I could have howled like a dog.”

“I have had a letter,” she said. It means that I must go away.”

“What is the matter?” I asked, bending my head, for there was in her voice that heralding of sorrow which, at the moment, seems worse than definite grief.

“It’s Kitty. Kitty is dead.”

I looked up, dazed and stupid, and she met my gaze with clear, tearless eyes.

I only felt that I felt nothing.

Here had we been going on just as usual—eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, reading, writing—and Kitty, little Kitty, was dead.

“I can’t understand.”

“Nor I,” Lucilla said, with a heavy sigh. “Such a child herself! And so happy!”

We sat a long time silent.

On her pale, wan brow, there were traces of that misery which cannot sleep and cannot weep.

“You have had a bad night,” I said at last. A silly thing to say!

She gave me a scrap of foreign paper, on which two or three words were written in pencil.

“Auntie dear, will you bring Baby home?—K.”

“He sent me that, poor man!” she said. “The last words that she wrote!”

I looked into the mounting flames, and thought how absurd it was that we should be there—we so much older—speaking about a scrap of Kitty’s writing as if it were a relic.

I looked into the mounting flames, and thought how it would be with me when the fire on that hearth was cold.

I looked at the reflection of them in the smooth shining surface of the piano, and thought how it would be with me when that casket of sweet sounds stood locked and silent.

I looked at the little picture of the sea.

"You must not go!" I said, thinking aloud.

"I have sent a telegram to say that I am coming," she replied, quietly. "I start at once—to-morrow."

I tried to pull myself together, to say something that would help her, and all that I could think of was :

"Have you the money?"

"Yes," she said, "I have always kept a reserve at the Bank, in case of illness. I am drawing on that. I shall put it back by and by."

"It is a wild-goose chase. You will lose what you have hardly earned. You will

never even see the child, it will be dead before you get there."

"Perhaps!" Lucilla said; and something in the way she said it made me ashamed.

"I will come and see you off. When do you start?"

She shook her head.

"I do not want that. I would rather go by myself. I would rather say goodbye to you here. We need not say it yet. I have done all that I had to do. There is plenty of time."

"Plenty of time"—and she was going the next day! "Plenty of time"—and in an hour I must leave her. It seemed to me as if I might as well depart then and there. "Plenty of time"—how could she say the words?

"I suppose you are going third-class—or in the steerage?"

"No, not that. It is not necessary."

The daring offer to lend her money froze on my lips.

"When shall you come back?" I asked. Not that I felt as if she would.

“I am keeping on my rooms,” she said. “You will see that they are not let over my head? Our landlord would do anything for me, I know, but I do not trust his wife in the same way.”

“Any one who enters this room enters it over my dead body.”

“You will be kind to Persica?”

“I will do my best to be a mother to Persica,” I said, stretching out my hand to the cat. But Persica made eyes that were rounder and greener than ever, and stared at me with the utmost want of confidence over a rim of blue-lined basket.

These were the only remarks in the testamentary line with which Lucilla favoured me, and I felt grateful to her, for I could not have borne more. I was afraid she was going to leave me Tricksy Wee.

I do not know how the long moments went. Every single one as it passed, seemed to be the longest in life, and yet I grudged its passing.

“Will you write to me?” I said at last.

And suddenly I recollected something that I could do for her, the only thing that she had asked me to do, and I had left undone.

“Do not answer yet !” I said hurriedly.

I took the old faded letter from my waistcoat pocket.

“There !” I said. “Burn that !”

And I put it into her hand, and I turned away.

There was a long silence.

When I looked round again, Lucilla, a soft pink colour flushing her cheeks, the letter still in her hand, her eyes most marvellously bright, sat gazing at me.

She held it up ; I could see that her hand trembled.

“Listen !” she said, and indeed it was necessary, for my eyes were making my ears deaf, “I have written to you before. This is the first letter that I wrote you.”

The years had fallen away. The veil that Time had dropped was lifted. She let the writing go. She covered her glowing face with her hands. The girl of nineteen

summers stood before me; (but O, more beautiful!)

I have the letter still.

She would not see me again. She was inexorable as to the next morning.

“No, no!” she whispered. “Not again, I cannot. Say once again to me those three words that you said long ago, in the library! Say nothing more! Keep me as I am, and I will come back to you. We have waited all these years, you for me, I for you, we can wait half a year longer.”

And I am waiting.

And to beguile the days—and for my wife when she is married—I have written out what my most weak and stumbling words could not make clear to her.

Parting, in middle age, is not the anguish of youthful parting; but the risks are increased, the insurance money is higher. I watch the winds, ever before my eyes I see the restless waves. Stronger than winds and waves is my faith that she will return to me.

Her life upon the treacherous water is not a whit more guarded than mine in the little dingy street where we dwelt together.

It may be—I do not think it will—it may be that, before she returns, I shall have started on a longer voyage over that unknown sea whither we are all bound. If this should happen, I would leave behind me something that would recall to her the days of my unconscious wooing, something that should tell her, however faintly, that through all my life, from the day on which Khartoum fell, and the door of that dreary house in Bayswater shut behind the bright-eyed girl, to the day when I set forth on death with hope undying, and see again before me the same bright eyes, there has been nothing, there will be nothing in my heart of hearts but this one word,

LUCILLA.

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:



AUG

1996

BOOKKEEPER

PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC.
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066
(412) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022225558